EARLY INDIA

A CONCISE HISTORY

D.N. JHA

MANOHAR

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A CONCISE HISTORY

The book presents a lucid survey of major developments in the ancient and early medieval periods of Indian history. It discusses issues like the antiquity and authorship of the Harappan civilization, the original home of the Aryans and the salient features of their life, the emergence of caste system and the process of state formation culminating in the establishment of the Maurya empire. Challenging the stereotype of an 'unchanging' India and the myth of the 'golden age', the book not only underlines the changes in its social structure over centuries but also devotes much space to India's contact with the outside world leading to the enrichment of its culture. Moreover, it pays adequate attention to the transformation of India from pre-feudal to feudal society and to the discussion of the contours of feudal culture.

Throughout the book, emphasis has been laid on elements of change and continuity and the early historical developments have been examined from the vantage point of the present, resulting inevitably in a criticism of those who try to locate a cloud cuckoo land in the past and vindicating a critical understanding of popular misconceptions. Written in the author's characteristically telling style, *Early India: A Concise History* is an indispensable reading for those interested in acquiring familiarity with different facets of early Indian history and culture.

Dwijendra Narayan Jha was Professor of History at the University of Delhi.

Professor Jha's published works include *Revenue System in Post-Maurya and Gupta Times* (Calcutta, 1967), *Ancient India: An Introductory Outline* (Delhi,1977), *Studies in Early Indian Economic History* (Delhi, 1980), *Economy and Society in Early India: Issues and Paradigms* (Delhi, 1993), *Ancient India in Historical Outline* (Delhi, 1998) and *Holy Cow: Beef in Indian Dietary Traditions* (Delhi, 2001), the last one reprinted as *The Myth of the Holy Cow* (London-New York, 2002). Apart from publishing a number of articles in various journals, he has also edited several works including *Feudal Social Formation in Early India* (Delhi, 1987), *Society and Ideology in India: Essays in Honour of R.S. Sharma* (Delhi, 1996) and *The Feudal Order: State, Society and Ideology in Early Medieval India* (Delhi, 2000).

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2005

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Preface

The present book is a restructured and revised version of my *Ancient India in Historical Outline* which was published in 1998 and has been reprinted eight times ever since and which provides a narrative of historical developments in India up to the end of the ancient period with the beginnings of feudal society during the time of the Gupta kings whose rule came to a close around the middle of the sixth century. My readers, consisting of undergraduate students and non-specialists having some interest in India's past, have persistently suggested that instead of ending the narrative around the middle of the first millennium I should extend it further so as to cover its second half when the social, economic and cultural contours of classical Indian feudalism seem to have taken a definite shape. And that is what the present work precisely seeks to do. It presents an account of major historical developments from the earliest times till about the end of the twelfth century and thus presents an account of the ancient and the early medieval periods of Indian history. In my survey of the pre-feudal developments I have drawn heavily on my *Ancient India* (1998) but there is much that is new in the pages that follow. The first four chapters of this book are a freshly written version of the sections of my earlier publication and the last chapter is altogether a new section of the book. The chapter-wise bibliography has taken note of as many recent publications as possible and is intended to familiarize the reader with the latest writings in the field of early Indian history.

In writing this book I have received much help from Professors R.S. Sharma, Irfan Habib and Michael Witzel who have made valuable suggestions on several points. Professors Shingo Einoo and K.M. Shrimali were as usual extremely generous in helping me out whenever I needed any material which was difficult to get in the libraries of Delhi. I have also benefited from interaction with my colleagues Professor B.P. Sahu, Dr Nayanjot Lahiri, Dr R.C. Thakran and Dr Vishwa Mohan Jha. Shankar Kumar, Mihir Kumar Jha and Narottam Vineet have extended

bibliographical assistance and have helped me in the preparation of the index. I am grateful to all of them. But I always fumble for words to express my indebtedness to my wife Rajrani who has been a constant source of inspiration to me.

I cherish the fond memories of Bhuvan Sinha who was a great help in all my academic pursuits and whom death took away from us while this book was in the making.

The manuscript of the present book was finalized towards the end of 2001 but it could not be sent to the press before the middle of the last year. Mr B.N. Varma and Mr Ramesh Jain have, however, made up for this delay by expeditiously seeing it through the press for which I thank them.

1 September 2004 D.N. JHA

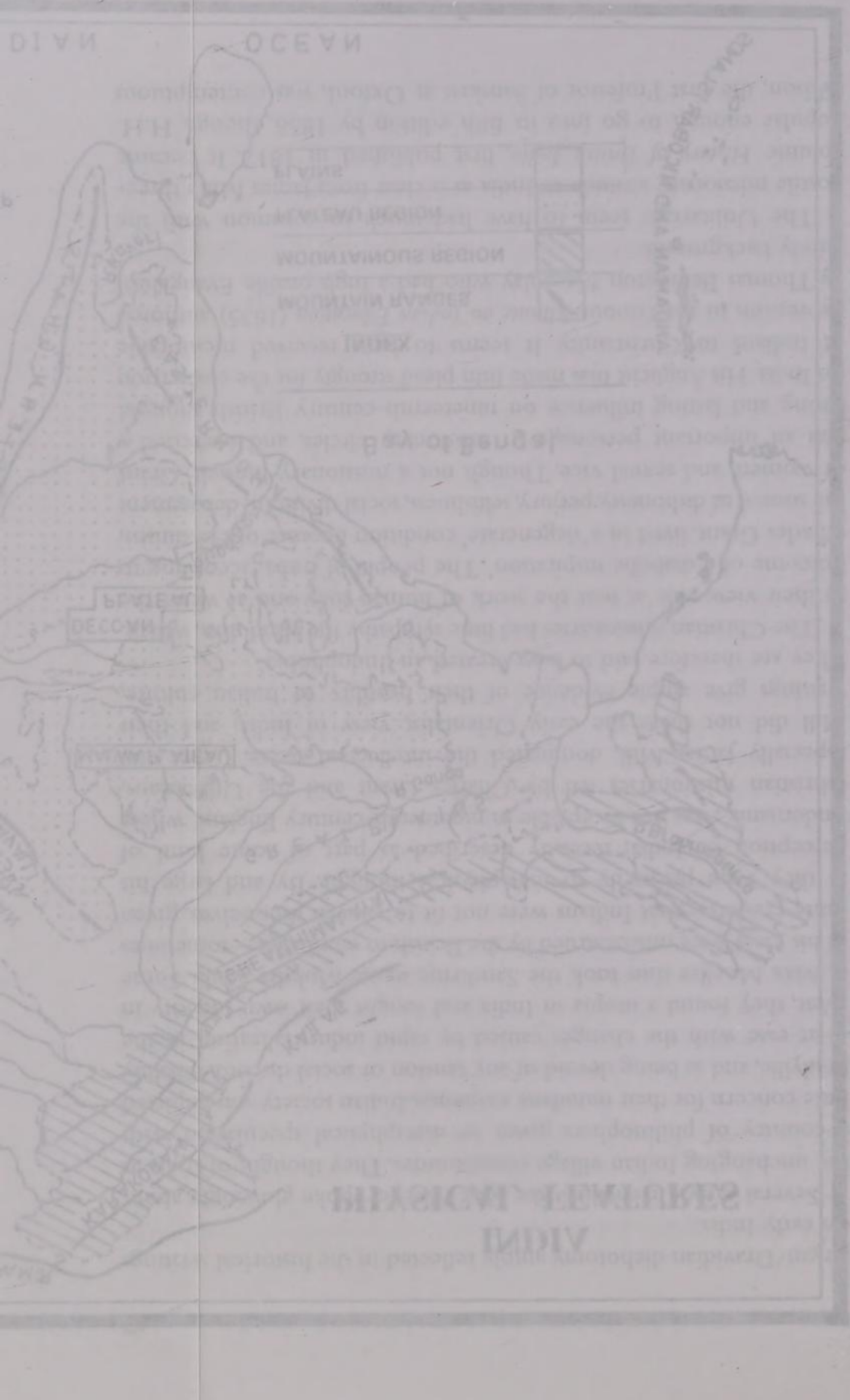
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

For long centuries India was known to the rest of the world only through stray references to it in classical Greek and Roman literature. In the eighteenth century, however, we come across a few Jesuit fathers in the peninsular region making a systematic effort to understand the life of the Indian people. Father Hanxleden, active in the Malabar area from the end of the seventeenth century to the fourth decade of the eighteenth, wrote the first Sanskrit grammar in a European language, which remained unpublished. Father Couerdoux, in 1767, was the first to recognize the affinity between Sanskrit and European languages. The foundation of Indology, however, was laid not by Jesuit missionaries but by officers of the English East India Company. A trading organization at the time of its inception in 1600, it gradually acquired territories which were later to become the building blocks of the British empire. The transformation of a trading partner into a ruling power, though an area of absorbing study, is not our concern here. But it is necessary to bear in mind that historical writing—in the modern sense—on early India began as a sequel to the establishment of the English East India Company. The growing administrative responsibilities of the Company, especially after 1765 when the Mughals granted it the right to collect revenues and administer civil justice in Bengal, made it necessary for its officers to gain familiarity with the laws, habits, customs, and history of the Indian people. Many administrators, therefore, evinced a keen interest in Indian literature and culture. In 1776 N.B. Halhed translated into English the most authoritative among all the early Indian legal texts, the law book of Manu, which appeared in German two years later. In 1785 Charles Wilkins rendered into English the *Bhagavadgita*, the most popular religious text of the upper caste Hindus, to be followed in 1787 by his translation of the *Hitopadesha*, a popular collection of fables composed by Narayana in the twelfth century in Bengal. H.T.

Colebrooke, who had around this time become associated with the collection of revenue in Tirhut (north Bihar) and was able to master Sanskrit, wrote extensively on the Indian concept of time, religious rites and customs, and various other aspects of Indian culture on the basis of intensive study of the original texts.

The most important of the Company's officers who gave a real boost to Indian studies was Sir William Jones. He came to Calcutta as a judge of the Supreme Court of Bengal in 1783 and founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal in the following year. The Society and its journal, *Asiatic Researches*, provided a much needed forum for Oriental studies and can be regarded as a landmark in the revelation of the traditional thought and culture of India. Jones was a polyglot with knowledge of Hebrew, Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Sanskrit and a smattering of Chinese. He translated the *Shakuntalam* of Kalidasa (which drew unqualified admiration from Herder and Goethe and reached an extremely wide European readership), the *Gitagovinda*, and legal texts like the *Al Sirajiyyah*, and the *Manavadhamashastra*. Intensive research on the Muslim and Hindu laws of inheritance undertaken by Jones and his British contemporaries may be seen as an attempt to break the Indian monopoly of legal knowledge and to assert British judicial power. The efforts of Sir William Jones were followed by the establishment of the Bombay Asiatic Society in 1804 and of the Asiatic Society of Great Britain in 1823. All this gave a stimulus to the study of ancient Indian history and culture, and Indological studies no longer remained the preoccupation of Company officers in India. Interest in Indian culture was aroused at a number of European universities where several scholars worked on Sanskrit and related subjects. The best known of the early Orientalists and Indologists was Max Mueller, who never visited India and spent most of his time in England. The affinity between Sanskrit and certain European languages, once discovered, was stressed. This may partially explain the growing interest in Indology outside England. It also gave rise to the idea of a common Indo-European homeland and heritage. The Aryans in India came to be regarded as the brethren of the Europeans. Some upper class Indians like Keshub Chandra Sen took this literally and identified themselves with the British people. A distinction was drawn between Aryans and non-Aryans, and a variety of virtues were attributed to the former. This in turn gave rise to the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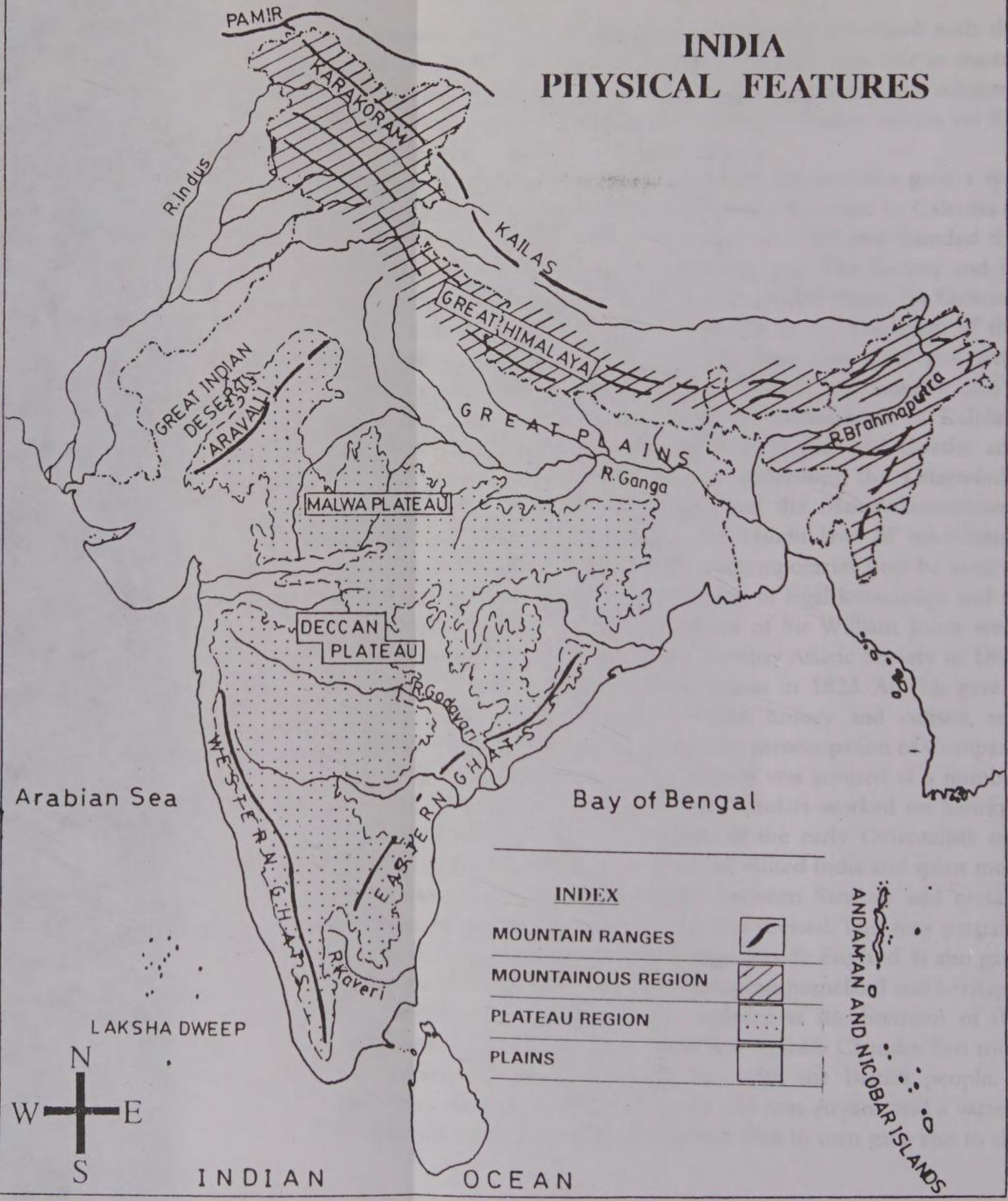


Aryan/Dravidian dichotomy amply reflected in the historical writings on early India.

Several early Orientalists like Max Mueller spoke glowingly about the unchanging Indian village communities. They thought of India as a country of philosophers given to metaphysical speculation with little concern for their mundane existence. Indian society was depicted as idyllic, and as being devoid of any tension or social discord. Possibly ill at ease with the changes caused by rapid industrialization in the West, they found a utopia in India and sought their own identity in it. Max Mueller thus took the Sanskritic name Moksha Mula. Some of his ideas were misconstrued by the British to emphasize—sometimes quite crudely—that Indians were not fit to govern themselves, given as they were primarily to metaphysical thought. By and large his perception of India, recently described as part of some kind of 'Indomania', was not acceptable in nineteenth-century England where Christian missionaries led by Charles Grant and the Utilitarians, especially James Mill, dominated the intellectual scene. Grant and Mill did not share the early Orientalist view of India, and their writings give ample evidence of their hostility to Indian culture. They are therefore said to have created an 'Indophobia'.

The Christian missionaries had little sympathy for Hinduism, which, in their view, was 'at best the work of human folly and at worst the outcome of a diabolic inspiration'. The people of India, according to Charles Grant, lived in a 'degenerate' condition because of Hinduism, the source of dishonesty, perjury, selfishness, social divisions, debasement of women, and sexual vice. Though not a missionary himself, Grant was an important personage in missionary circles, and exercised a strong and lasting influence on nineteenth-century British thought on India. His Anglicist bias made him plead strongly for the conversion of Indians to Christianity. It seems to have received memorable expression in the famous *Minute on Indian Education* (1835) authored by Thomas Babington Macaulay who had a high profile Evangelical family background.

The Utilitarians seem to have had much in common with the hostile missionary attitude to India as is clear from James Mill's three-volume *History of British India*, first published in 1817. It became popular enough to go into its fifth edition by 1858, though H.H. Wilson, the first Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford, was contemptuous

of Mill's perception of Indian culture and went to the extent of saying that 'its tendency was evil'. Mill divided Indian history into three periods, the Hindu, Muslim and British and thus laid the foundations of communal historiography promoted by both the British and the modern Indian revivalist scholarship. Unduly critical of the people and their culture, Mill postulated that contemporary as well as ancient India was barbarous and antirational. Indian civilization, according to him, showed no concern for political values and India had been ruled by a series of despots. Stagnant since its inception, Indian society was inimical to progress. All this was based on a grossly distorted version of the early Orientalist writings on India. In his book Mill was obviously making a case for changing Indian society through British legislation. This he was doing without ever having visited the country or knowing any of its languages—a fact he tried hard to justify by making the facile claim to writing a 'judging history'. Mill's *History* was one of the prescribed texts at institutions like the Haileybury College where English officers received their training before coming to India. Hence, the historical writings on India by British administrators betray Mill's influence in considerable measure.

The best known of the British administrator-historians on ancient India was Vincent A. Smith. He came to India in 1869 as a member of the Indian Civil Service and remained in service until 1900. He wrote all his nine books on Indian history after retirement. Of these his *Early History of India*, published in 1904, was based on a deep study of the primary sources available at that time. It was the first systematic study of early Indian history and remained perhaps the most influential textbook for nearly fifty years and is sometimes used by scholars and students even today. Less hostile to India than Mill, Smith nevertheless believed that the country had a long tradition of oppressive despots—a tradition which ended only with the advent of the British. The implication was that Indians were not fit to rule themselves. In keeping with the main trends of contemporary British historiography, Smith gave much attention to great men in history; and Alexander, Ashoka, Chandragupta II, and Akbar became his heroes. Smith exaggerated the ruthlessness of ancient Indian kings. The theory of governance in the *Arthashastra* was to him like that of imperial Germany with which Britain was later at war. He described Kautilya's

penal code as 'ferociously severe', conveniently ignoring the fact that other ancient law codes were no less so.

The corpus of literature generated by the British scholars on early India was not univocal and it is possible to identify differences in the perceptions of individual authors. Nevertheless, it remains true that the British wrote on early Indian history with a view to providing historical justification for the Raj and its exploitation of Indian resources. This quite often led to gross distortion of historical evidence. Such portrayals are viewed as part of the Orientalist discourse in which Orientalism is interpreted 'as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and for having authority over the Orient'. All this, however, does not negate the heuristic value and importance of the Orientalist writings in extending our understanding of the imperial power and its resistance.

British views of early Indian history came to be strongly challenged by Indian scholars influenced by Indian reformist leaders, and also by growing nationalism and political awakening. Ramakrishna Paramahansa asserted that Hinduism embraced all religions in its fold. His disciple Vivekananda, and later Annie Besant, sought to prove the superiority of the Hindu religion. Bankim Chandra preached that a revival of Hinduism was essential for the growth of India as a nation. Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj, gavè the call 'Back to the Vedas'. Under the impact of such teachings, Indian scholars strongly defended Hinduism and it was often held that the Vedas represent its purest form—thus completely ignoring the fact that Hinduism was at best an umbrella term for the various strands of Indian religious thought, beliefs, and practices prevalent in the Indian subcontinent. The Vedas were regarded as the repository of all knowledge and rational thought, and even as anticipating some modern scientific discoveries. Inevitably the myth of the Aryan race stirred the imagination of nationalist leaders as well as historians. Already the early Orientalists had established that Sanskrit and certain European languages had connected histories. Indian scholars now regarded the Indo-Aryans as the originators of human civilization with India as its cradle. Inevitably they attempted to push back the antiquity of Indian culture. B.G. Tilak assigned the Vedic texts to the third millennium BC, while A.C. Das placed some of the Rigvedic hymns in the geological ages. Though the discovery of the Harappan civilization in

1923-4 proved the falsity of their assertions, the fantastic antiquity given to ancient Indian culture in general, and to the Vedas in particular, remains a hobby-horse of some scholars even today. This does not apply to Rajendra Lal Mitra (1822-91), Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar (1837-1925), and Vishwanath Kashinath Rajwade (1869-1926), who generally adopted a rational attitude to the study of the past. Mitra published a tract to show irrefutably that in ancient times beef-eating was not a taboo. Bhandarkar, being a social reformer, supported widow remarriage and castigated the evils of the caste system and child marriage on the basis of his study of the ancient Indian texts, and made significant contributions to the reconstruction of the political and religious history of early India. V.K. Rajwade's insightful study in Marathi of the evolution of the institution of marriage is a classic. He is also remembered for collecting a large number of Sanskrit manuscripts and sources of Maratha history, later published in twenty-two volumes.

Initially inspired by the ideas of social reform, Indian historical scholarship gradually became overtly anti-imperialist. With the radicalization of Indian politics after the partition of Bengal in 1905 and the simultaneous growth of militant nationalism, Indian historical writings were conditioned and influenced by contemporary political developments which sharpened the edge of the freedom struggle. Partly in reaction to the imperialist view of India's past and partly as a step towards the building up of national self-respect, Indian historians made zealous efforts to refurbish the image of India's past. Hindu culture was looked upon as the precursor of other Asian cultures; this buttressed the theory of pan-Hinduism. The ancient period of Indian history, equated with the Hindu period in James Mill's scheme of periodization, was regarded as one of prosperity and general contentment. Social inequalities were glossed over and Indian society was portrayed as a model of social harmony and peace. The age of the Guptas came in for special praise. It was considered the golden age of Indian history—an idea that continues to find importance in most textbooks.

As the Indian demand for political rights and representative government grew in strength during the 1920s, nationalist historians began to attribute to ancient Hindus the highest achievements in the field of political thought and practice. In doing so, they often made

extravagant claims, especially after the discovery of Kautilya's *Arthashastra* in 1905 and its publication in 1909. Parallels were drawn between Kautilya's social and economic policies and the social legislation of Bismarck. Kautilya's views on social and economic management were interpreted as a combination of state-socialism and *laissez-faire*. The *mantri-parishad* (council of ministers) mentioned in the *Arthashastra* was compared with the Privy Council of Britain, and Kautilyan kingship with its constitutional monarchy. Ancient Indian tribal oligarchies were equated with Athenian democracy. All this was intended to prove that Indians had long known the tradition of democratic government, for which they were struggling against the British. Thus, nationalist historians—K.P. Jayaswal being the foremost among them—provided an ideological weapon to the freedom movement. But their approach to the study of early Indian history and culture was no less unhistorical than that of the British historians. They culled isolated favourable references from original Sanskrit texts, and on their basis generalized about the entire ancient period. This was an implicit denial of the changing character of Indian society—an idea which Mill and other British scholars never tired of repeating and which found its way into Marx's constructs of the 'Asiatic Mode of Production' and 'Oriental Despotism' which have been questioned in recent years by many scholars on various grounds.

The glorification of ancient India by nationalist historians meant the glorification of what appeared to them as Hindu India. In a sense, therefore, their writings seem to have been linked with the revivalist ideas of Vivekananda, Dayananda, and others. In the 1930s and 1940s this linkage became quite clear; nationalist historiography gave an impetus to the ideas of V.D. Savarkar, the high priest of Hindu revivalism. He created the concepts of *Hindutva* and *Hindu Rashtra* and gave his supporters the dangerous slogan 'Hinduize all politics and militarize Hindudom'. Under his inspiration K.D. Hedgewar founded the fanatically communal and fascist organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), in 1925 at Nagpur. The pernicious role of the RSS in spreading the virus of communalism in the body politic of India can hardly be exaggerated. The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by the RSS-trained Godse on 30 January 1948, the demolition of the Baburi Masjid in Ayodhya on 6 December

1992 and-more recently, in March 2002—the state sponsored genocide of Muslims in Gujarat, are the unforgettable milestones in the unfolding of the backward-looking Hindu revivalist and fascist politics of contemporary India.

At the historiographical level Hindu revivalism meant the acceptance of Mill's periodization based on the untenable premise that ancient Indian kings up to AD 1200 subscribed to the Hindu religion. That some of the major ruling dynasties like the Indo-Greeks, Shakas, and Kushanas were not Hindu was ignored. Indeed, even the Mauryas were not Hindu—the greatest Maurya ruler Ashoka was a Buddhist! In fact, ancient Indians never described themselves as 'Hindu'. First used by the Achaemenid Persian rulers in the sixth century BC and later by the Arabs and others in the ethno-geographic sense, the term 'Hindu' stood for all those who lived on or beyond the river Sindhu (Indus), the inhabitants of al-Hind (India). Foreign to early Indian literature, this name passed into Indian nomenclature much later and gained currency during the colonial period when it acquired a clearly religious connotation. Moreover, even during the so-called Muslim period, supposedly beginning from 1206, many parts of the country continued to remain outside the suzerainty of the Turkish Sultans. More or less at the same time as they established their political power in Delhi the Ahoms appeared as an influential force in Assam and adjoining regions and remained independent of the Muslim rulers. In Rajasthan, the Delhi Sultans, despite repeated attempts, could not subdue the Rajput states of Mewar and Marwar until the early sixteenth century when Babur defeated Rana Sanga in a fierce battle. Orissa remained a citadel of Brahmanical religion during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and generally remained outside the sphere of Muslim influence until its kings sought the support and patronage of Akbar in the latter half of the sixteenth century. In a substantial part of the peninsular region the Vijayanagara kingdom, headed by Hindu kings, ruled for three hundred years, from the fourteenth century. During this period they subjugated numerous chiefs and royal families and humiliated several Muslim sultanate regimes of the Deccan; at the zenith of their power they were among the greatest Hindu rulers of India. On the other hand, if the mere coming of Islam into India is considered to be a dividing line between the ancient and the medieval periods, there is ample evidence to show that the followers of Islam came to India as raiders

and traders much before the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate. There is thus hardly any justification for treating the thirteenth century as a major turning point in India's history. But in spite of the fallacious and tendentious periodization of Indian history by James Mill, nationalist historians adhered to his rigid chronological scheme. They ignored the essentially composite character of Indian culture and consciously supported the cause of Hindu chauvinism. Their unwillingness to evolve a scientific basis for the periodization of history paved the way for communal historiography, thus providing grist to the reactionary mill.

In the post-Independence period, alongside the Hindu chauvinist view of the Indian past, there has been going on a debate on periodization. This has been possible primarily because many recent scholars have paid much attention to the study of social, economic, and cultural processes and have tried to recognize the linkage between these factors and political developments. This shift from the traditional political-dynastic history to non-political history is basically linked with a critical reappraisal of the primary sources. For example, the earlier tendency to use such categories as the 'Buddhist India', the 'Epic age', and the 'Sangam age' has begun to be challenged. For neither the Buddhist texts nor the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* belong to a specific period; indeed they contain several chronological strata—a fact which is also true of the Sangam literature, the earliest corpus of texts in the Tamil language. By paying due attention to the stratification of ancient Indian literary material (though inhibited by its predominantly religious character) and interpreting it in conjunction with archaeological and anthropological evidence, it has been possible to identify the elements of change and continuity in early Indian society, economy, and culture. Studies in this direction have generated a lively on-going debate among historians. Some of them, however, see too much red in all this, especially after the 'crisis' and 'collapse' of Communism and the consequent 'setback' to Marxism, and tend to strengthen the views of neo-colonialist historians who argue subtly that the early Indian society was stagnant, with political authority always too dispersed to be characterized properly as a state.

The need to identify the major turning points in the life of the people which could form the basis for periodizing early Indian history was suggested by Damodar Dharmanand Kosambi in *An Introduction*

to the Study of Indian History (1957) and *Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline* (1965), which, despite severe criticism of their author's Marxist predilections, have achieved the status of classics. In Kosambi's view, the history of society, economy, and culture was an integral part of the development of the forces and relations of production which can provide a rational basis for periodization. There seems to have emerged a consensus, at least for the time being, in favour of this view. It is, therefore, possible to argue that the ancient period of Indian history did not end with the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in 1206 but much earlier, in the Gupta period when the first signs of feudalism were visible. The sixth century AD when the rule of the Gupta rulers came to an end may thus be treated as the *terminus ad quem* of the ancient period of Indian history.

The subsequent six centuries saw the full flowering of classical Indian feudalism. During this period the Indian political landscape came to be dotted with numerous kingdoms and principalities, all of them having decentralized feudal political power structures. There took place a marked decrease in the volume of trade, which had far-reaching socio-economic consequences. This not only led to the growth of the traditional self-sufficient village economy but also provided a suitable background for the subjection of the peasantry, the emergence of serfdom, and the development of the feudal agrarian system. Languishing trade weakened the inter-zonal communication between the different principalities and created conditions for the growth of regional cultural units, each with its own language and literature, script, and art style. Religious beliefs and practices also underwent changes in the wake of feudal developments. Thus, the doctrine of *bhakti* (devotion), reflecting the complete dependence of the serfs or tenants on the landowners, emerged as a dominant feudal ideology. Tantricism grew as a result of the interaction between the tribal and Brahmanical societies promoted by the widespread practice of making donations of land and villages in the backward and peripheral areas. It became an essential ingredient of Indian religions. Although most of these developments had their origin during the Gupta rule, they became prominent only during the following six centuries and feudalized the Indian social polity. The post-Gupta centuries, therefore, may be marked as a distinct phase in the history of India and may be characterized as the early medieval period.

This book presents a survey of the main developments during the ancient and early medieval periods, until the emergence and consolidation of classical Indian feudalism which later underwent several changes owing to various factors that call for a separate study and do not come under our purview here. Dynastic history, not being our primary concern, has been discussed only in the broadest outline. The rise and fall of empires have been explained with reference to their material bases. An attempt has been made to avoid the pitfalls of nationalist-chauvinist historiography; and the myths created by it during our freedom struggle and subsequently have been re-examined. In an endeavour to integrate the results of recent historical research into the present study I have tried to look for a meaningful pattern, often re-interpreting the already known facts. In looking around the early Indian landscape I have given special attention to elements of change and continuity in society and economy, to social tensions, mechanisms of exploitation, and the social role of religion and superstition. Obviously then in the following pages I have not viewed early India as a cloudcuckooland but as a country where social and economic inequalities existed—as they continue to exist in our own times—and where the exploited masses have contributed no less to its rich and diverse cultural traditions than their exploiters.

CHAPTER 2

From Prehistory to Civilization

When did man begin to live in India? The answer is suggested by a large number of primitive stone tools found in different parts of the country, from Kashmir to Tamil Nadu. The antiquity of the oldest of these tools and their makers goes back more than two million years ago, to the beginning of what is known as the Palaeolithic age. During this phase the people lived in very small nomadic communities. They used tools and implements of stone, roughly dressed by clipping, found throughout the country except the alluvial plains of the Indus, Ganga, and Yamuna rivers. Such tools were used for hunting, cutting, and other purposes. People wore animal skin, bark, or leaves as protection from the weather; and had no knowledge of cultivation and house building. In course of time came the ability to control fire and domesticate animals. In India, as elsewhere in the world, man thus lived for millennia in the hunting and food-gathering stage, though his tools give evidence of gradual evolution culminating in what is called the Mesolithic phase, marked by the important practice of domesticating animals. Palaeolithic and Mesolithic people practised painting, of which evidence comes from several sites. Bhimbetka, 45 km south of Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh, is the most striking of them; it gives ample evidence of rock paintings extending from the Palaeolithic to the Mesolithic periods. Sites such as Bhimbetka, Azamgarh, Pratapgarh, and Mirzapur provide unquestionable testimony for the existence of Mesolithic art which provides evidence of hunting, food-gathering, fishing, and other human activities like sexual intercourse, child birth, and burial. The social organization in the Mesolithic period tended to become more stable than it had been in the preceding Palaeolithic phase, and ecological and material conditions largely shaped the religious beliefs of the people.

Human communities entered a new stage of development known as the Neolithic Age, during which they became less dependent on

hunting and food-gathering and began to produce their own food. Although the beginning of the New Stone Age is assigned to 9000 BC in the world context, in South Asia the earliest Neolithic settlement is at Mehrgarh (Baluchistan, a province of Pakistan), dated to around 7000 BC. Some Neolithic settlements on the northern spurs of the Vindhyan range may be as old as 5000 BC but those in south India may be as late as 1000 BC. Neolithic people used tools and implements of polished stone; stone axes seem to have been quite popular as is evident from the large numbers of them found in the hilly tracts of the country. Since people were dependent solely on stone tools and implements, their settlements could not extend beyond the hill areas and they could not produce more than what was needed for their subsistence. But they were able to cultivate some important crops like rice, wheat, and barley. This, combined with domestication of animals, brought about a major change in subsistence strategies.

Towards the end of the Neolithic period, a significant development seems to have taken place—that of the use of metal. The first metal to be used was copper, and archaeologists have discovered several Chalcolithic cultures, based as they were on the use of stone and copper implements. Unlike the bronze-using Harappans, whom we will discuss in the sequel, Chalcolithic groups were primarily rural farming communities living in different parts of the country. Evidence of their settlements has come from many places. The important ones are Ahar, Gilund, and Balathal in Rajasthan; Kayatha and Eran in western Madhya Pradesh; Jorwe, Nevasa, Daimabad, Chandoli, Songaon, Inamgaon, Prakash, and Nasik in western Maharashtra; Narhan in eastern Uttar Pradesh; Pandu Rajar Dhibi and Mahishdal in West Bengal. In southern India also, many sites in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka have yielded a Chalcolithic horizon. In addition to the material found at these sites, more than forty hoards of copper objects like rings, celts, hatchets, swords, harpoons, spearheads, and anthropomorphs have been found in a wide area ranging from West Bengal and Orissa in the east to Haryana and Gujarat in the west, and from Andhra Pradesh in the south to Uttar Pradesh in the north. The largest of these hoards, consisting of 424 objects, comes from Gungeria in Madhya Pradesh. On the basis of the association of the copper hoards with a ceramic type called the Ochre Coloured Pottery, archaeologists have placed them between 2000 and 1500 BC.

The range of artisanal activity of the Chalcolithic people seems to have been fairly wide. They were expert coppersmiths and good workers in stone, and manufactured cloth and made beads of semi-precious stones. At some places, as at Inamgaon (Maharashtra), we find potters, smiths, ivory carvers, lime makers, and terracotta makers. The villagers domesticated animals such as cows, sheep, goats, and pigs, and hunted deer. The use of the camel as a draught animal was also known. They ate beef, though there is no strong evidence of their eating pork. They cultivated wheat, rice, and *bajra* as also several pulses such as lentil (*masur*), black gram, and grass pea. Spread as they were over a wide area, regional variations among the Chalcolithic communities were inevitable. They produced rice in eastern India which, together with fish, remains a staple food there even today. In western India were cultivated barley and wheat and in the lower Deccan, *ragi*, *bajra*, and several kinds of millets. According to the archaeological evidence from Maharashtra, the people buried their dead under the floor of their house in a north-to-south position along with pots and copper objects. Grave goods indicate the beginnings of social inequalities, and the striking difference in the size of the settlements implies that the larger communities dominated over the smaller ones. On the basis of the finds of terracotta and unbaked nude clay figures of women, it has been postulated that the worship of the mother goddess was prevalent.

The Chalcolithic settlements of India are spread over a long chronological span ranging from the early third millennium BC to the eighth century BC. Some of them are certainly pre-Harappan, while others are contemporaries of the Harappan culture and still others are post-Harappan. The contact between the technologically advanced Harappans and the Chalcolithic groups may not be ruled out altogether, but the latter could not acquire the traits of a civilization on account of their inherent limitations. Though they were good at working in copper, they did not know the art of mixing tin with copper to forge the much stronger alloy called bronze which paved the way for the rise of the earliest civilization in Crete, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Indus valley. The people of the Chalcolithic age did not know the art of writing; nor did they live in cities. These elements of civilization, however, appeared for the first time in the Indus region.

The Indus or Harappa culture originated in the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent and seems to have covered an area

EXTENT OF THE HARAPPA

N
W E
S

SHORTUGHAI
(c. 320KM.)

AFGHANISTAN

Islamabad

MUSA KHEL

HARAPPA

RANA GUNDAI

NAUSHAHRO

BANWALI

KALIBANGAN

Indus R.

Dry bed of Ghaggar R.

PAKISTAN

NAL

MEHI

MOHENJO-DARO

SUKKUR

KOT-DIJI

JHUKAR

KULLI

NINDOWARI

AMRI

CHANU-DARO

Luni R.

SUTKAGENDOR

BALAKOT

Karachi

DESALPUR

SURKOTADA

LOTHAL

RANGPUR

MEGHAN

BHAGATRA

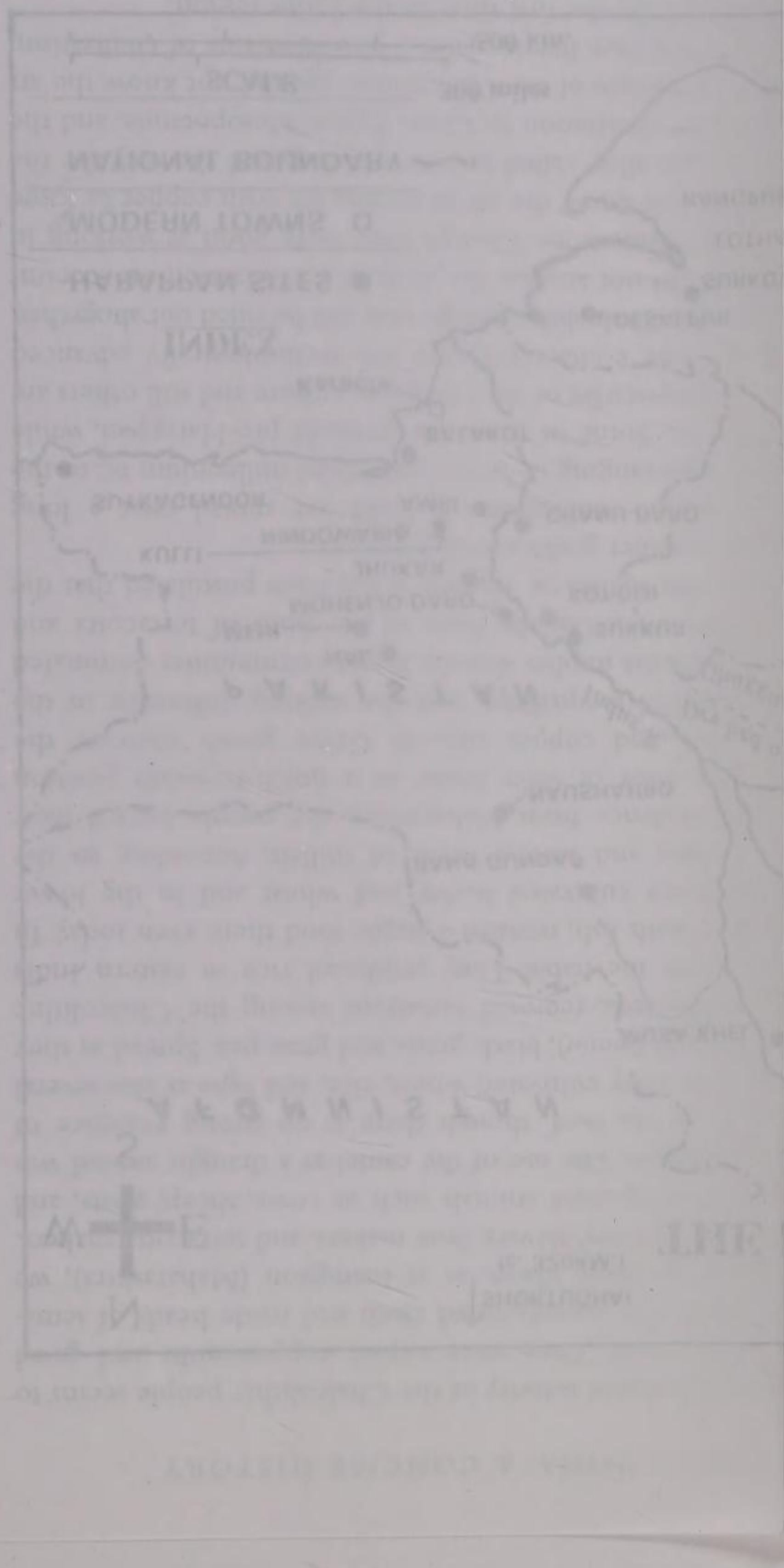
INDEX

HARAPPAN SITES ●

MODERN TOWNS O

NATIONAL BOUNDARY

SCALE
300 miles
500 km.



larger than those of the contemporary civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia. Discovered in 1921, this culture was spread over parts of present-day Panjab, Haryana, Sindh, Baluchistan, Gujarat, Rajasthan, and western parts of Uttar Pradesh, and coexisted with communities which thrived on hunting-gathering or pastoral nomadism. Nearly 1,500 Harappan sites scattered over this vast area have so far been explored or excavated, though a very limited number of them belong to the developed phase of the civilization and only half a dozen can be described as cities. Of these, Harappa on the bank of the Ravi in the Montgomery district (western Panjab), was the first to be excavated, whence the name Harappan is derived. Covering a circuit of a little less than 5 km the site has yielded a large variety of objects in the course of excavations and is one of the two most important Harappan cities. The other is Mohenjodaro, in the Larkana district of Sindh on the bank of the river Indus, the largest Harappan settlement. The third important Harappan site is Chanhudaro, about 130 km south of Mohenjodaro in Sindh. Lothal, at the head of the Gulf of Cambay, and Dholavira, situated on a small island in the Rann of Kutch, are both in Gujarat. Kalibangan in the dry bed of the river Ghaggar in northern Rajasthan and Banawali (Hissar district) in Haryana are also important sites giving evidence of the flourishing phase of the Harappan civilization in India. Other major sites include Rakhigarhi in Haryana, and the coastal cities of Surkotada in Gujarat and Sutkagendor near the Makran coast, close to the Pakistan-Iran border. Rangpur and Rojdi in the Kathiawar peninsula in Gujarat represented the later phase of the Harappan civilization. Despite the fact that a large number of sites associated with it have been discovered since 1946, the culture itself is still best known by the two cities of Mohenjodaro and Harappa. Since both are now in Pakistan, the Hindu revivalists today are busy locating the epicentre of this culture in the elusive Sarasvati valley.*

The general layout of the two cities seems to have been similar. To the west of each was a citadel, fortified by crenellated walls. On this were erected the public buildings. At Harappa the citadel was a

*The Sarasvati, identified with the Ghaggar in Panjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan and with the Hakra beyond the Indian border in Pakistan, is mentioned at several places in the *Rigveda* and is reminiscent of the Haraxvati in Afghanistan. Vedic references imply the semi-mythical nature of the Sarasvati

parallelogram, 420 m in length from north to south and 196 m from east to west; it was 13.7-15.2 m high. At Mohenjodaro it rose to a height of 6 m in the south and to 12 m in the north. At both the places the citadel was based on a mound, which may have been deliberately constructed for the purpose. The enclosed citadel area may have been used for religious and governmental purposes. At both the sites, below the citadel was the town proper, extending no less than a square mile. The main streets, some more than 9 m wide,

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'as goddess and mythical river in the sky or on earth', though at least two later Vedic texts (*Jaiminiya Brahmana* and *Panchavimsha Brahmana*) refer to its disappearance in the desert near *vinashana* and provide a basis for the much later Puranic mythology that it flows underground up to the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna at Prayaga (Allahabad). The Hindu fundamentalists, however, have been working overtime to prove that the Sarasvati basin was the original homeland of the Aryans, whom they regard as the authors of the Harappan civilization which they name after this river. A VHP protagonist and an archaeologist of sorts has proclaimed that the Harappan culture was the gift of both the Indus and the Sarasvati and 'perhaps more of the latter'. Since he habitually thinks in terms of India versus Pakistan and the Sarasvati versus the Indus, he unduly emphasizes that there are 700 Harappan sites on the Sarasvati as compared to 100 sites on the Indus and, on the basis of this claim, seeks to rename the civilization. The factitiousness of such a comparison, however, becomes evident if one takes into account other aspects of the problem. For example, none of the major Harappan sites like Harappa, Mohenjodaro, and Dholavira is located on the Hakra or the Ghaggar. According to an extensive survey conducted in Haryana and the neighbouring areas, there is no evidence of Harappan culture in Ambala and Sirsa districts where the Ghaggar is an important river. A similar exercise undertaken by M. Rafique Mughal attests to the existence of a much larger number of mature Harappan sites and a strikingly smaller number of late/or post-Harappan sites in the Cholistan desert (Bahawalpur) in Pakistan. Thus, far more urban sites appear on the Pakistani Sarasvati than on the Indian Sarasvati. But the effort to rename the civilization of the Indus valley after the lost Vedic Sarasvati is going on unabated so as to establish the superiority of the Sarasvati over the Indus, and is thus adding a communal dimension to Harappan and Vedic studies as also to the history of Panjab. All this, unmistakably reminds us of the political abuse of archaeology in Nazi Germany where Hitler and his National Socialist Party's ideologue, Alfred Rosenberg, drew much inspiration from the archaeologist Gustaf Kossinna who laid the foundations of an ethnocentric German prehistory.

were laid out on a grid plan. They were quite straight and intersected each other at right angles, thus dividing the city into large rectangular blocks. This kind of alignment of streets indicates conscious town planning and was not known in Mesopotamia or Egypt. The streets and buildings were provided with drains made of burnt bricks at Mohenjodaro and Harappa as well as at several other Indus sites, though at Kalibangan mud bricks were used for building purposes. The houses were equipped with rubbish-bins and bathrooms, and occassionally with a privy on the ground or upper floor. The bathrooms were connected by drains with sewers under the main streets. The drains were covered either with bricks or stone slabs. The drainage system is one of the most impressive achievements of the Harappans and presupposes the existence of some kind of municipal organization.

Stone buildings are conspicuous by their absence at the Harappan sites. Baked as well as unbaked bricks were the usual building material, though we have evidence of the use of mud bricks at several places such as Kalibangan. The houses of varying sizes, often of two or more storeys, consisted of rooms constructed around a rectangular courtyard. The large houses were meant for the rich and had much the same plan—a rectangular courtyard surrounded, in some cases, by a maximum of twelve rooms. The parallel rows of two-room cottages unearthed at Mohenjodaro and Harappa were perhaps used by the poorer sections of society and anticipated the 'coolie' lines of modern Indian towns. From this may be inferred the existence of class differences in Harappan society.

Plate 1: View of site showing Great Bath. Mohenjodaro, Pakistan. Harappa period.

In Harappa, Mohenjodaro, and Kalibangan, the citadel area contained monumental structures which stood on a high mud brick platform. Of the large buildings that have been so far discovered, the Great Bath in the citadel at Mohenjodaro is the most striking. A specimen of beautiful brickwork, it is a rectangular tank and measures 11.88 x 7.01 m and 2.43 m deep. At the north and south ends of the Great Bath brick steps led to the bottom of the tank, which could be emptied by a drain. The Bath, it has been suggested, was meant for ritual bathing.

In Mohenjodaro the largest building is a granary, 45.71 m long and 15.23 m wide, though its identification has been challenged. The 'Great Granary' is among the well-known buildings at Harappa and consisted of a series of brick platforms on which stood two rows of six granaries. Circular brick platforms to their south were meant for threshing grain. At Kalibangan also have been found brick platforms; these may have been used for granaries which constituted an important feature of Harappan cities. Several Harappan sites share some of their features. Chanhudaro lacks a citadel, but like these urban centres, it has produced evidence of the use of drains and baked-brick houses. At Lothal (in Gujarat), 720 km south-east of Mohenjodaro, has been revealed a great artificial platform with streets and houses of regular plan. In addition to the urban settlement, some archaeologists claim, a brick dockyard connected with the Gulf of Cambay by a channel has also been discovered here. Sutkagendor, 48 km from the Arabian Sea on the Makran coast, consisted of a formidable citadel and a lower fortified settlement and may have been a sea-port for trading. The Harappan towns situated along the sea coast include Sotka Koh (near Pasni in Pakistan) and Balakot (72 km north-west of Karachi), lying at a distance of 13 km and 19 km respectively from the Arabian Sea. The coastal settlements served as ports and participated in regular maritime trade with West Asia. Town planning in most of these places seems to have been marked by a striking uniformity; this can also be said of the structures.

On the basis of the general uniformity in town planning, it has been postulated that the Harappan people had a developed state organization and that Mohenjodaro was the capital of their extensive empire with Harappa and Kalibangan as its 'subsidiary' centres. The possibility that the priests may have ruled in Harappa is precluded by

the fact that no religious structures except the Great Bath have been found at any Harappan site; this is in contrast to the cities of Lower Mesopotamia where definite evidence of the priestly political authority is available. The prevalence of a fire cult at Lothal appears probable in the later phase, but there is nothing to indicate the use of temples. Similarly trade contacts with West Asia may indicate a greater Harappan concern for commerce than for conquest. But this can hardly support the view that a class of merchants ruled at Harappa. In fact, any idea of the political organization of the Harappans will remain highly speculative till their script is deciphered.

The earliest specimen of the Harappan script was noticed in 1853 and the complete script was recovered by 1923 from a large number of inscriptions written on a wide range of objects, notably on the intaglio seals. These seals were made mostly of carved and fired steatite, and were presumably used by the propertied people to mark and identify their property. Most specimens of writing come from Harappa and Mohenjodaro, giving evidence of intensive writing activity there. The script is logographic and has 375 to 400 signs written generally from right to left. More than fifty bold, though unsatisfactory, claims to its decipherment have been made. Hindu chauvinists connect the script with Sanskrit, others with Dravidian or proto-Dravidian languages, and still others with the Sumerian language. But the language of the Harappans was probably Dravidian because Brahui, a language of this family, is still spoken in Baluchistan and Sindh in Pakistan, besides some parts of Afghanistan, Iran, and Turkmenistan. According to a recent suggestion, however, the Harappans also spoke the Munda language in some parts of their cultural zone.

The failure to decipher the script of the Harappans has been a major hindrance in a comprehensive reconstruction of the different aspects of their society. But as a result of several decades of digging at various places in India and Pakistan there is now an impressive amount of material relating to their life. Our knowledge of their food habits and subsistence strategies is based on botanical and faunal studies, motifs of plants and animals on painted pottery, figurines, and portrayals on seals. Judging by the environmental diversity, it appears that the Harappans could not have adopted a uniform subsistence pattern. The diversity in subsistence activities is often seen as an important

adaptive strategy to support urban centres. Together with hunting and gathering they practised agriculture on a considerable scale and produced, in addition to peas, two types of wheat and barley. A good quantity of barley has been discovered in Banawali in Haryana. The Harappans also produced sesamum and mustard which were used for oil. Evidence of rice cultivation is not available from places like Mohenjodaro and Harappa. But at Lothal and Rangpur (near Ahmedabad) people used rice as early as 1800 BC. Dates and field peas were also grown and formed items of the Harappan diet. A fragment of cotton cloth found at Mohenjodaro proves beyond doubt that the Harappans grew cotton.

The Harappan cultural zone fell in a comparatively low rainfall area, and it is likely that irrigation was necessary for cultivation. But it is doubtful that the Harappans practised canal irrigation. Most agricultural land in the alluvial plains seems to have been watered by flood, though some archaeologists argue for the existence of irrigation canals of the Harappan period. According to some of them, the massive tank at Lothal, identified by its excavator with a dockyard, may have been a reservoir filled by river floodwaters. In any case, it is probable that the Harappans were familiar with several methods to control water for agriculture. Whether or not they used a plough has sometimes been controversial. No hoe or ploughshare has been found, but the evidence of a furrowed field in Kalibangan indicates that the Harappans used a wooden ploughshare. Who drew the plough—men or oxen or some other animal—is not known.

No less important than agriculture was animal husbandry which played an important role in the Harappan subsistence system. The people were familiar with a range of animals. A majority of Harappan terracottas represent cattle; the cow was not represented. Besides sheep and goats, dogs, cats, humped cattle, water buffalo, and elephants were domesticated. The Harappans certainly ate the flesh of cattle, including cow and ox, a fact unpalatable to modern-day *Hindutva* enthusiasts. Asses and camels were used as beasts of burden. Finds of bones of a large number of wild animals from various settlements indicate that the people were acquainted with deer, rhinoceros, and tortoise, though the horse seems to have been unknown to them. The animals mentioned above required different kinds of environment for their survival and the familiarity of Harappans with them is also

an indication of the latter's ability to adapt themselves to a variety of living conditions. This explains the diversification of the Harappan subsistence economy which, in spite of its being somewhat archaic, produced enough surplus to support the urban population.

Although they continued to make tools of stone the Harappans lived in the Bronze Age. They manufactured bronze by mixing tin with copper. Tin was possibly brought from Afghanistan, though Hazaribagh in Jharkhand may have been another source of its supply. Copper was brought from the Khetri copper mines of Rajasthan, but it could have also come from Baluchistan. Both metals, however, were difficult to obtain. Bronze tools were, therefore, not prolific at Harappan sites. Their tool types comprised flat axes, chisels, knives, spearheads, and arrowheads of copper and bronze. Various techniques of working in copper were known, such as hammering, lapping, and casting. Brick kilns, associated with copper working, have been discovered at various places. Working in bronze, however, was not very common and bronzesmiths, therefore, may have been an important social group. The authors of the Harappan culture possessed the knowledge of gold. Beads, pendants, armlets, brooches, needles, and other personal ornaments were often made of gold, though the use of silver was perhaps more common.

Besides metal working, the Harappans practised numerous other arts and crafts. Seal-cutting occupied a place of importance and the Harappan sites have yielded more than 2,000 seals. These form a class by themselves and seem to have been linked with trading activities. No less important was the bead-maker's craft. At Chanhudaro and Lothal bead-makers' shops have been discovered. Beads of gold, silver, copper, faience, steatite, semi-precious stones, shell, and pottery have been found in abundance. The long-barreled beads of carnelian rank among the finest technical achievements of the Harappans. Evidence of textile manufacture has come from Mohenjodaro which has yielded a piece of woven cloth. Spindle whorls were used for spinning and cloth of wool and cotton were woven. Judging by the surviving massive brick structures at the Harappan settlements, brick manufacturing and masonry appear to have been important crafts. The Harappans also made boats. The potter's craft was fairly well developed; and the potters were quite a visible artisanal group. Wheel-turned and mass produced, most Harappan pottery represents a blending of

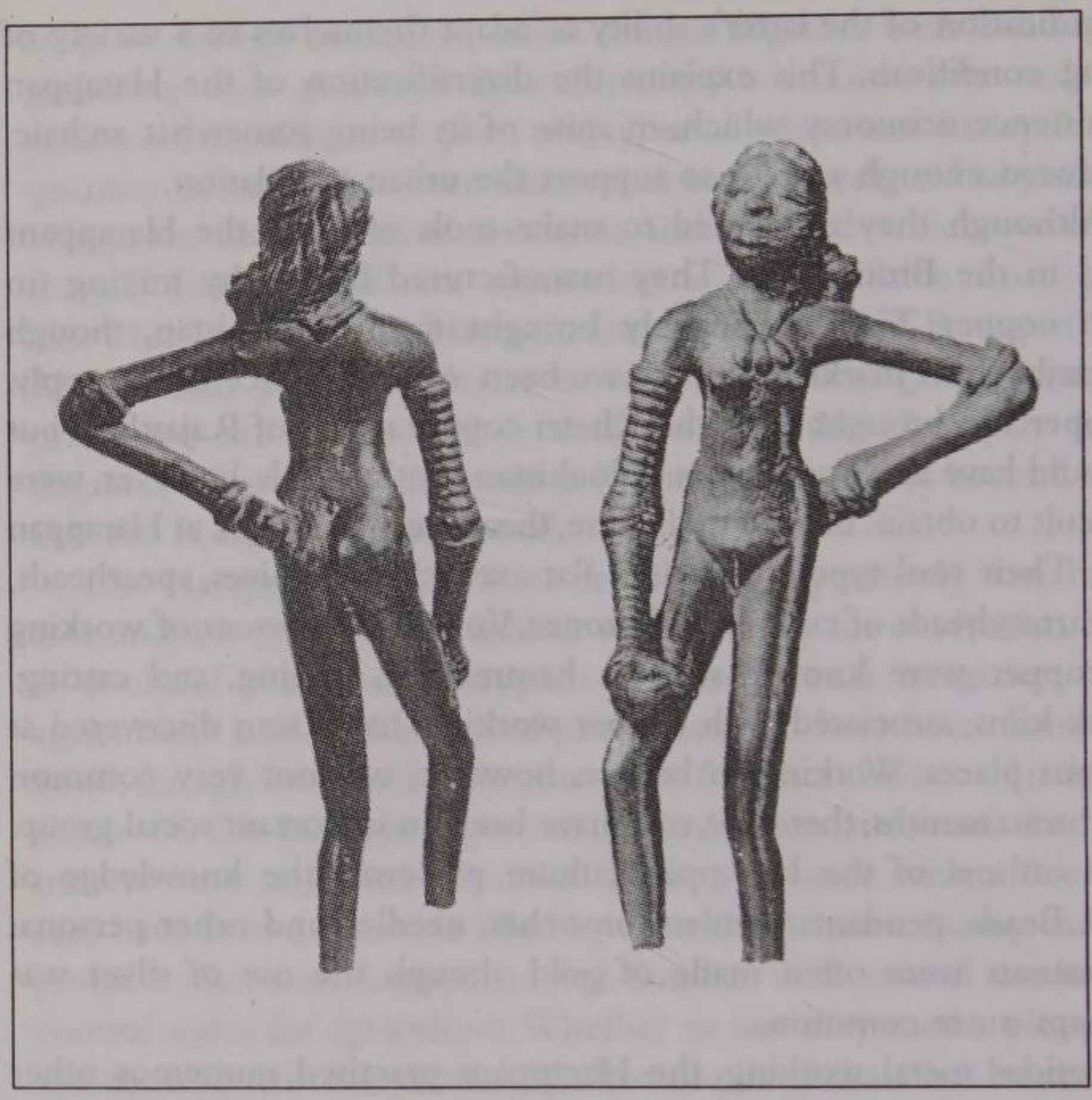

Plate 2: Female figure, front and back views. From Mohenjodaro, Pakistan. Mature Harappa period, *c.* 2100-1750 BC.

the ceramic traditions of the north-west and those of the cultures to the east of the Indus. Most Harappan pottery is plain and may have been meant for local use. But a substantial part of it, treated with red slip and black painted decoration, may have been prestige items meant for long distance trade.

Harappan craft production included some works of art. The most striking of them is a bronze statuette of a pert and provocative 'dancing girl', naked but for a necklace and a large number of bangles covering one arm. The figurines of a buffalo and a ram and the two little toy carts are also well-known bronze pieces of Harappan art. A few stone sculptures have also been found. Of them the bearded head (presumably of a priest) from Mohenjodaro has much artistic value; this is also true of the two small male torsos discovered in Harappa.

The use of bronze or stone for artistic creation seems to have been extremely limited. Terracottas, in contrast, have been found in great number indicating their universal popularity either as toys or cult objects.

A people with numerous arts and crafts, the Harappans engaged in commodity production for which they obtained raw material from outside. Gold may have been imported from south India, especially Mysore, where it was in good supply in antiquity and is still mined. Afghanistan and Iran were other likely sources of this metal. Silver was imported probably from Afghanistan and Iran. Copper may have been brought from south India and from Baluchistan and Arabia, though within the Harappan zone itself Rajasthan was an important source of its supply. Lapis lazuli is rare in Harappan archaeological material, and came from Badakshan in north-east Afghanistan. Turquoise came from Iran, amethyst from Maharashtra, agate, chalcedonies, and carnelian from Saurashtra and western India. Alabaster was possibly brought from several places both to the east and the west. Jade came from Central Asia.

The Harappan trade links extended to the cities of Mesopotamia where some two dozen Harappan seals have been found in cities like Susa, Ur, Nippur, Kish, etc. Some ancient sites in the Persian Gulf region (e.g. Failaka and Bahrain) have also yielded seals of Harappan origin. From the Indus region only three cylinder seals and a few metal objects from Mesopotamia have been found. The archaeological evidence of trade with West Asia is not very impressive; and the general absence of Mesopotamian trade items at Harappan sites is striking. How far this was due to the fact that Mesopotamia exported only perishable goods to the Indus zone is a matter of speculation. But the Mesopotamian literature speaks of merchants of Ur carrying on trade with foreign countries. Sargon of Akkad (2350 BC) is said to have taken pride in the fact that the ships of Dilmun, Magan, and Meluha passed through his capital. Dilmun is commonly identified with the island of Bahrain in the Persian Gulf, and Magan may be the Makran coast. Meluha is generally understood to mean India, especially the Indus region and Saurashtra. Whatever the volume of trade, numerous representations of ships and boats on Harappan seals and a terracotta model of a ship from Lothal give us some idea of the mode of riverine and maritime transport. Bullock carts may have

played a crucial role in inland transport. Trade and exchange activities were regulated by a developed system of weights and measures. Numerous articles of chert, limestone, steatite, etc., were used as weights based on 16 or its multiples. The provenance of sticks inscribed with measure marks is a testimony to the fact that the Harappans knew the art of measurement. The prevalence of a uniform system of weights and measures in even the far-flung Harappan sites suggests that there was a central authority to regulate exchange activities.

Some idea of the Harappan religious beliefs and practices may be formed on the basis of seal and terracotta figurines. Numerous nude female figurines in terracotta are believed to represent a popular fertility goddess and the 'Mother Goddess' has been taken to be central to Harappan religion, though this has been questioned on several grounds. Some Vedic texts also show reverence for a female goddess but it was only after centuries of hibernation that she surfaced as the supreme goddess during the early medieval period. The male deity of the Harappan people was the horned god depicted on the seals, nude but for many bangles, necklaces, and a peculiar headdress consisting of a pair of horns. On one of these seals he is surrounded by four wild animals—an elephant, a tiger, a rhinoceros, and a buffalo; beneath his seat are two deer. He apparently shared some of the traits of the later Indian Shiva who appears bizarre, eccentric, and terrifying in his numerous portrayals found in classical Sanskrit poetry, though this need not mean that he is as old as the Harappan times. Numerous symbols of the phallus and female sex organs made of stone found in Harappa indicate the prevalence of phallus worship—a practice which, despite its condemnation in the *Rigveda* as being prevalent among the non-Aryans, became a respectable form of worship in later times; in fact, clay phalli continue to be worshipped and then dumped every morning in some parts of the country even today. In the Indus cultural zone trees were also worshipped; the *pipal* tree, depicted on several seals, was perhaps an object of special veneration, though neither its charcoal nor its seeds have been found at any Harappan site. The Harappans also worshipped animals, notably the humped bull, which is considered venerable even today. However, it remains doubtful that Harappan divinities were placed in temples as was common in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. The religious importance of trees, animals, birds, etc., evident from the seals found in excavations,

has been interpreted to mean that the Harappans practised animism. The Harappan religion may have anticipated some features of later Indian religion. But to trace contemporary Indian religious practices to Harappan times often ignores the elements of change that crept into them from time to time. For example, the discovery of many graves in Harappa and other places proves beyond doubt that the Harappans generally buried their dead in a north-south orientation, along with different types of goods. This practice is in sharp contrast to the subsequent practice of cremation prevalent in most parts of the country. It is a different matter that if a communalist Hindu is told that all his ancestors did not practise cremation he may well jump down our throat!

There seems to be a consensus among scholars that by about the beginning of the second millennium BC the urban phase of the Harappan culture came to an end, though signs of its decay are noticeable even earlier when cities like Harappa, Mohenjodaro, and Kalibangan began to experience decline in urban planning and structural activity, and tended to become slums. The Great Bath and the granary at Mohenjodaro fell into disuse. The city, archaeologists tell us, shrank to a small settlement of 3 ha from the original 85 ha. Decline is also evident at Harappa, Kalibangan, and Chanhudaro as well as at most of the other settlements. The disappearance of systematic urban planning and building activity was accompanied by almost sudden vanishing of the Harappan script, weights and measures, bronze tools, and the red ware pottery with black designs. The Harappan cities seem to have been finally deserted by 1800 BC. Around this time their external trade with West Asia seems to have come to an end; for Meluha (identified with India) ceases to be visible in the Mesopotamian records. The population of Harappan urban centres either perished or moved away to other areas. Not surprisingly, traits of the post-urban Harappan culture are found at many places in Pakistan, in central and western India, in Panjab, Rajasthan, Haryana, Jammu, Kashmir, Delhi, and western Uttar Pradesh during 2000-1500 BC, which witnessed the spread of non-Harappan Chalcolithic settlements of early farming communities in different parts of the country. It is likely that some of them were direct descendants of the late Harappan culture.

The progressive degeneration and final collapse of the Harappan

civilization has been attributed to several factors. It is generally held that calamitous alternations in the course of the Indus and the Ravi rivers led to the desiccation of the countryside which ceased to produce food for the urban centres. This made the major Harappan cities weak under the pressure of population which was forced to migrate. Excavations reveal that Mohenjodaro itself was flooded more than once; traces of several phases of catastrophic flooding have been detected here. Chanhudaro was also twice destroyed by massive inundations. The floods perhaps derived from violent geomorphological changes in the lower Indus region, leading, in turn, to the economic decline of the Harappan settlements. Evidence has been adduced to show that by the middle of the second millennium BC there was an increase in the arid conditions in the Harappan cultural zone, thus drying up the river Ghaggar-Hakra in one of its core regions with disastrous consequences for the rural and urban economies. Environmental factors may thus have contributed to the decline of the Harappan urban centres towards the beginning of the second millennium BC.

Some exotic tools and pottery, found at several places, indicate the slow percolation of new peoples from the west into the Indus basin, causing dislocation of the earlier inhabitants during the last phases of the Harappan culture. Times were now uncertain and life insecure. The jewellery hoards were 'cached away' under house floors during Mohenjodaro's last phase to which also belong some skeletons, either buried hastily or not buried at all, giving the impression that 'marauders from outside or city gangs themselves fought over the last spoils'. Indirect evidence of the intrusion of people from the west is also available from Harappa. Here, to the south-west of the citadel, was found a cemetery, known as Cemetery H, which has yielded new types of pottery indicative of the presence of an alien people. New ceramic types hinting at the migration of peoples from the west are found at several other sites situated on both sides of the border between India and Pakistan. Interestingly, even the *Rigveda*, the earliest text of the Aryans, refers to the destruction of the settlements of the non-Aryans. All this may imply that the new people were the horse-riding/ chariot-driving barbarians who were either pushed ahead of those belonging to the Indo-Aryan linguistic stock, but speaking some other language, or who were identical with the Indo-Aryans

themselves, who may have come from Iran through the hills. But neither the archaeological nor the linguistic evidence proves convincingly that there was a mass-scale confrontation between the Harappans and the Aryans who came to India, most probably, in several waves.

CHAPTER 3

The Vedic Life

The idea of the Aryan invasion of the urban centres of the Harappan people leading to the final disappearance of their culture has been enmeshed in controversy, though it has been put to various uses by different groups of scholars and social and political activists. The invasion theory was first clearly expounded by an eminent British archaeologist who trained most of the first generation of post-Independence professional Indian archaeologists, and who remained more or less unchallenged for quite some time. But since the early 1960s this theory has come in for much criticism. Some archaeologists—Indians in particular—have criticized the theory with a vengeance as it were, and have vehemently denied the idea of an invasion. They have also assigned the Aryans an Indian homeland from where they supposedly migrated to different parts of Asia and Europe, though there is no evidence to support this view. Guided by racist considerations, the autochthonists have used all the weapons in their armoury to uphold the imagined superiority of the Aryan race.

Both in India and Europe, the Aryans have been thought of as a race in the genetic sense and have been credited with many cultural achievements. In India socio-economic reformers led by Dayanand Saraswati, who founded the Arya Samaj in 1875, laid stress on Aryan culture as the root of all Indian tradition and sought the sanction of the Vedas, the earliest extant Aryan literature, for their ideas. Several authors and political activists subsequently propagated the idea of the Indian homeland of the Aryans and of the domination of the world by them and in so doing they went to ridiculous extremes. Even when the Hindu nationalist leader Bal Gangadhar Tilak, for example, postulated in 1903 that the Aryans originally lived in the Arctic, the RSS chief M.S. Golwalkar later located this region in modern Bihar and Orissa. Some scholars continue to believe in pan-Aryanism and go so far as to claim that India was the cradle of world culture. Blind-

racial prejudice has led them to believe and propagate that every peak of Indian cultural achievement must be Aryan; accordingly the authors of even the Harappan culture have been taken to be the Aryans. This idea has always betrayed a strong upper-caste Hindu bias, because the Aryans did not include the shudras and the untouchables. The bias is glaringly evident in the activities of Hindu communal and revivalist organizations in recent years. But from the nineteenth century itself, when Dayanand's Arya Samaj came into being, there has been a sharp reaction to the upper-caste orientation of the theory of the Aryan race. A contemporary of Dayanand and a leader of the non-brahmana movements in Maharashtra during the Peshwa rule who founded the Satya Shodhak Samaj in 1873, Jyotiba Phule exploited the theory in a radical manner. He regarded the Aryans as aliens who subjugated the indigenous peoples described in the Brahmanical texts as Dasas and shudras, the real inheritors of the land. The ideas of Phule gave ideological support to non-brahmana movements in other parts of the country and these played a progressive role in his times, though in contemporary India these may have been used, consciously or unconsciously, to justify frequent caste confrontations. In European countries, as in India, the Aryan concept has played a significant role since the nineteenth century when the Romantic movement in literature and racist ideas derived much inspiration from it. The culmination of racism took place under the Nazi regime in Germany which gave a hideous racial cast to the term 'Aryan' and to its official philosophy which sanctioned the cruellest genocide in history. Although unfortunately, the concept, central to the pre-World War II fascisms, is being revived by a large number of racial hate groups mushrooming in different parts of the world even in our own times, in academic circles the whole concept of race based on colour (of the hair, skin, and eyes) and skeletal measurements is now regarded as invalid. In view of the research in the biological sciences, it is extremely difficult to think of any ethnic group as having retained its purity of blood for any length of time.

The existence of groups of people speaking closely related languages called Indo-European cannot however be doubted. Sanskrit, Avestan (Old Iranian), Latin, Greek, Germanic (German, English, Swedish), Slav (Russian, Polish), and Romance (Italian, Spanish, French, Rumanian) languages belong to the Indo-European family. Sanskrit

and Old Iranian (Old Persian and the language of the sacred texts of the Parsis, the *Avesta*) are even more closely related and come from an earlier language called Indo-Iranian. On the basis of the similarity between these languages, it has been postulated that the original speakers of Indo-European (sometimes mistakenly still called 'Aryans') had had a common homeland somewhere in the steppes stretching from southern Russia to Central Asia. From this region the Indo-European-speaking peoples may have migrated to different parts of Europe and Asia. One of their branches, the Indo-Iranians (also called the Arya) migrated to Iran where they lived for a long time. From the Iranian tableland they moved in the south-eastern direction towards India where they encountered the feeble remnants of the city civilization of the Indus valley. Their eastward movement is amply borne out by the Vedic literature. Individuals such as the sage Vasishtha and his clan and entire tribes such as the Bharata and the Ikshvaku are described as crossing the river Indus, though, despite the on going full-throated propaganda of the autochthonous origin of the Aryans, nowhere in the Vedas do we hear of their westward movement. The dispersal of the Aryans in India was not a single event. It took place in several stages, covering several centuries, and involving many tribes. These tribes were often considerably different from each other but, at the same time, they shared many cultural traits.

The chief source of information on the early history of the Aryans in India are the Vedas, perhaps the oldest literary remains of the Indo-European language group. The word *veda* means knowledge. There are four Vedas: *Rig*, *Yajur*, *Sama*, and *Atharva*. The *Rigveda* is a collection of 1,028 hymns, mostly prayers to gods, for use at sacrifices. The *Yajurveda* contains sacrificial formulae in prose and verse to be recited by the priest who performed the manual part of the sacrifice. The *Samaveda* is a collection of verses from the *Rigveda* for liturgical purposes. The *Atharvaveda* consists mainly of magical spells and charms. Attached to each Veda are various explanatory prose manuals called Brahmanas, whose concluding portions are called the Aranyakas (wilderness books). Secret and dangerous owing to their magical power, the Aranyakas could be taught only in a forest. The Upanishads are texts, often in dialogue form, appended to or incorporated into the Aranyakas, but of a more esoteric and nascent philosophical character.

Vedic literature has been traditionally held sacred; for it is believed to have a divine source. The Vedas, according to the popular Indian perception, are eternal (*nitya*). The various sages (*rishis*) who were their authors no more than received them from god. Transmitted orally from generation to generation, the Vedas were not committed to writing until very late. The Vedic texts may be divided into two broad chronological strata: the early Vedic (*c.* 1500-1000 BC) when most of the hymns of the *Rigveda* were composed; and the later Vedic (*c.* 1000-600 BC) to which belong the remaining Vedas and their branches. The two periods correspond to the two phases of Aryan expansion in India.

The geographical horizon of the Rigvedic hymns gives us an idea of initial Aryan settlement in the subcontinent. The earliest Aryans lived in eastern Afghanistan, Panjab, and the fringes of western Uttar Pradesh. Though not adequately supported by the archaeological evidence, this is clearly borne out by the *Rigveda* which refers to the western tributaries of the Indus, the Gomati (modern Gomal), the Krumu (modern Kurram), and the Kubha (modern Kabul). The Suvastu (Swat) is the most important river mentioned in the area to the north of Peshawar. The name implies 'fair dwellings' and may be evidence of Aryan settlements in the Swat valley. But the main focus of the Rigvedic culture seems to have been the Panjab and Delhi region. Here the most frequently mentioned rivers are the Sindhu (Indus), and the Sarasvati (now lost in the Rajasthan deserts and existing only in the imagination of the credulous as flowing underground up to Prayag or Allahabad and joining invisibly the Ganga and Yamuna there), the Drishadvati (Chautang), and the five streams which collectively gave their name to Panjab (five waters): Shutudri (Sutlej), Vipas (Beas), Parushni (Ravi), Asikni (Chenab), and Vitasta (Jhelum). The geographical knowledge of the early Aryans does not seem to have extended beyond the Yamuna and the upper Ganga, which are mentioned only twice in the *Rigveda*.

The early Aryan settlers were engaged in taking possession of the Land of the Seven Rivers (*saptasindhava*) represented by the Indus and its principal tributaries. This often led to conflict between various Aryan tribes. The most important of the tribal wars to which the *Rigveda* refers was the Battle of Ten Kings (*dasarajna*). Sudas, we are told, was the king of the Bharata tribe settled in the western Panjab.

Vishvamitra, his chief priest, had led him to victorious campaigns on the Vipas and the Shutudri. Later Sudas dismissed Vishvamitra and appointed Vasishtha, who possessed greater knowledge of the priestly lore. Vishvamitra, feeling slighted, formed a confederacy of ten tribes, five of whom were important and which are frequently referred to in the *Rigveda* as *panchajanah* (five tribes). In the battle that followed on the banks of the Purushni, Sudas was victorious. It is likely that there took place other intertribal wars of this kind.

The chief opponents of the Aryans were however the aboriginal tribes and other indigenous inhabitants of non-Vedic origin known as Panis, Dasas, and Dasyus. Many passages in the *Rigveda* show a general feeling of hostility towards the Panis. Described as wealthy, they refused to patronize the Vedic priests or perform Vedic rituals, and stole cattle from the Aryans. More hated than the Panis were the Dasas and Dasyus. The Dasas have been equated with the tribal people called the Dahaes, mentioned in the ancient Iranian literature, and are sometimes considered a branch of the early Aryans. Divodasa, a chief of the Bharata clan, is said to have defeated the non-Aryan Sambara. The suffix *dasa* in the name of the chief of the Bharata clan indicates his Aryan antecedents. In the *Rigveda* instances of the slaughter of the Dasyus (*dasyu-hatya*) outnumber references to conflicts with the Dasas, thus giving the impression that the Rigvedic Aryans were not as hostile to them. Dasyu corresponds to *dahyu* in the ancient Iranian language. It has therefore been suggested that conflicts between the Rigvedic tribes and the Dasyus were those between the two main branches of the Indo-Iranian/Indo-Aryan peoples who came to India in successive waves. The Dasas and Dasyus were most likely people who originally belonged to the Aryan-speaking stock and in the course of their migration into the subcontinent they acquired cultural traits very different from those of the Rigvedic people. Not surprisingly, the *Rigveda* describes them as 'black-skinned', 'malignant', and 'nonsacrificing', and speaking a language totally different from that of the Aryans.

In a sense the Aryan subjugation of the earlier inhabitants meant a reversal to a comparatively less advanced way of life. For the Harappans were culturally far more advanced than the Aryans who figure in the *Rigveda* as destroyers of forts, not their builders. The chief Aryan god Indra is described as the breaker of forts (*purandara*) and is said to

have shattered ninety forts for his protégé Divodasa. We are told that he 'rends forts as age consumes a garment', though the Rigvedic *purs* were nothing more than 'simple mud wall and palisade forts'. The *Rigveda* speaks of several ruined cities and associates them with earlier inhabitants of the area, presumably the Harappans.

As might be expected of a people without cities, the early Aryans did not have an advanced technology. But they certainly enjoyed an advantageous position in relation to their adversaries. They used horses and chariots, which were not known to the pre-Vedic people. The horse (*ashva*) is mentioned 215 times in the *Rigveda* and may have been common among gods as well as humans. The horse-drawn chariot with spoked wheels finds frequent mention in the *Rigveda* and subsequent Vedic texts. Possibly they also used some better weapons of bronze. Their knowledge of metals, however, seems to have been limited. The *Rigveda* mentions only one metal called *ayas* (copper/bronze). In view of the widespread use of bronze in Iran around the middle of the second millennium BC the word has been taken to mean bronze. Yet bronze objects assignable to the period of the *Rigveda* have not hitherto been found in any significant quantity at the sites excavated in the Land of the Seven Rivers. The evidence for the use of bronze on any considerable scale being slight, there is no archaeological basis for the view that the early Aryans were highly skilled smiths or produced tools and weapons superior to those of the Harappans. Nor did the Rigvedic people possess any knowledge of iron.

The Aryans came to India as semi-nomadic people with a mixed pastoral and agricultural economy, in which cattle-rearing played a predominant role. Cattle formed their most valued possession and the chief form of their wealth; a wealthy person was called *gomat*. Prayers were offered for the increase in cattle population. The sacrificial priest was rewarded for his services with cattle, and the cow was the chief medium of exchange. Cattle were often the cause of inter-tribal wars. Thus, the word for battle came to be known as *gavishti*, literally 'a search for cows'. Several other terms for battle like *goshu, gojit, govid, govindu, goshan(i), goshati, gavish(a), gaveshana, gavya(ya), gavyant, gavyayu, gavyat* and *gavyu* were also derived from *go*, a general term for cattle. Since cattle seem to have been tended by common herdsmen, it has been suggested that members of the tribe collectively owned

them. Moreover, those who herded their cows in the same cowshed came to belong to the same *gotra*, a word which later came to indicate descent from a common ancestor, and hence an exogamous clan unit. The daughter was known as *duhitri*, milcher of the cow. The cow is described in one or two places as not to be killed (*aghnya*), but this may imply its economic importance. It was not yet held sacred, its politicization being a recent phenomenon. Both oxen and cows were, in fact, slaughtered for food. Beef was a delicacy offered to the guest. The *Rigveda* mentions the word *atithinir* (cows fit for guests) and the name of the Vedic hero, Atithigva, means literally 'slaying cows for guests'. A later text, Panini's *Ashtadhyayi*, even describes a guest as a cow-killer (*goghna*).

In addition to cows, goats and sheep were also domesticated both for milk and meat. Nor surprisingly, quantities of charred bones of cattle and other animals have been found at several archaeological sites. Bhagwanpura and Dadheri in Haryana, where the post-Harappan cultural horizons coincide with the early Vedic period, are cases in point.

Cattle-breeding was the chief source of livelihood of the Rigvedic people. But they also practised agriculture. References to agricultural activities in the *Rigveda* are not many; the term *krishi* (to cultivate) occurs rarely in it. The well-known term *hala* for the plough is not found, but two other terms for the plough, *langala* and *sira*, are mentioned. Ploughs were drawn by oxen; and ploughshares of wood were used for cultivation. The early Aryans possessed some knowledge of seasons, which promoted agriculture; the *Rigveda* mentions five seasons. Fire was used for burning forests and making land fit for cultivation. This was an easy option available because the people did not have knowledge of iron. Copper with which they were familiar was not of much value for agricultural operations. References to ploughing, sowing, reaping, threshing, and winnowing occur in the later portions of the *Rigveda*. The agrarian economy therefore may have become more stable towards the end of the early Vedic period. The Rigvedic people are known to have cultivated only one variety of grain called *yava* which meant barley. Unlike cattle, land was perhaps not commonly owned by members of a tribe. The *Rigveda* mentions several words for fields, and the practice of measuring land, but it nowhere refers to the sale, transfer, mortgage, or gift of land by

an individual. Obviously the concept of private property in land had not struck root.

The early Aryans, who were essentially pastoral, did not develop any political structure which could measure up to a state in either the ancient or the modern sense. The Land of the Seven Rivers, the region of their initial expansion in the subcontinent, was held by small tribal principalities. The *Rigveda* mentions thirty clans and tribes; five of them were major ones and are referred to as *panchajanah*. Kingship was the same as tribal chiefship, the term *rajan* being used for the tribal chief. Primarily a military leader, the chief of the tribe fought for cows and not territory. He ruled over his people (*jana*) and not over any specified area of land. He was therefore called their protector (*gopa janasya* or *gopati janasya*). The term *gopati*, basically indicating the protector of the herds of cattle, came to acquire the extended meaning of the protector of the people or tribe (*jana*). The word *jana* occurs twenty-seven times in the *Rigveda*, but *janapada* is not mentioned at all and the term *rajya* occurs only once. Yet the idea of territorial monarchy emerged towards the close of the Rigvedic period when the chief/king (*rajan*) came to be looked upon as an upholder of the *rashtra*. Entitled to booty from successful cattle raids or battles, the king could also receive gifts in kind. But his position was not beyond question. Very likely he owed his office to the choice of the people, though kingship was perhaps confined to certain families. Available evidence does not indicate the continuance of royal succession in one family for more than three to five generations. This suggests that the principle of hereditary succession from father to son was not yet fully established. Tribal assemblies like the *sabha* and the *samiti*, which discharged judicial and political functions, substantially limited the king's authority. The *sabha* was a council of the older members of the tribe; perhaps women also attended it. The *samiti* was a general tribal assembly and was less exclusive than the *sabha*. Another tribal assembly, the *vidatha*, also may have restricted the power of the *rajan*, though its political role is not possible to determine precisely. His dependence on the priest, who was quite influential, perhaps further acted as a constraint on the chief.

The Rigvedic people did not possess an elaborate administrative apparatus which would have required adequate surplus production. The only surplus that was available was in the form of *bali*, mentioned

in the *Rigveda* several times in the sense of tribute to a prince or an offering to god. Tribute paid to the chief was obligatory but there is no evidence to show that it was regular. A functionary called *senani* is referred to, but information about a regular standing army is lacking. Since cases of theft, burglary, cheating, and cattle lifting were known in the Rigvedic period, the existence of police officials cannot altogether be ruled out, though we do not know much about them. About half a dozen state officials are mentioned in the *Rigveda*. They include the chief queen known as the *mahishi* (lit. the great female buffalo, the powerful one) and the charioteer; the latter was quite significant because of the importance of the horse and the chariot in the contemporary milieu. Certain rudiments of state had begun to appear but the political system on the whole was a tribal chieftainship, devoid of a firm territorial basis, the halo of a latter-day monarchy, the regular standing army and an elaborate officialdom.

Early Aryan social organization was essentially tribal, based on kinship. Two terms, *jana* and *vish*, repeatedly occur in the *Rigveda*. The *jana* comprised several *vish*; the former stood for the whole tribe and the latter for the clan. It is held that the *vish* was divided into *gramas*, but evidence for this is inadequate. The basic unit of Aryan tribal society was the patriarchal family called the *kula*. The eldest male member of the family was known as the *kulapa* (protector of the family). In the hymns desire is expressed for *praja*, including both boys and girls. But the people seem to have been keen on having brave sons (*suvirah*) who could fight their wars. In spite of the patriarchal character of the family, the position of women seems to have been better, in some respects, in the Rigvedic period than in subsequent times. Girls normally married after puberty. Some of them may have grown up, and stayed for long as spinsters in their parental homes, albeit in unusual circumstances. Such was the case with Ghosha, for example, who was suffering from a skin disease and could get a husband only when the Ashvins befriended her. In some cases a woman could freely mix with young men and have love affairs. She could take part in sacrifices with her husband. Some unmarried women like Visvavara and Apala, however, performed rituals all by themselves, though often with the purpose of finding husbands. Some women are also said to have been authors of Rigvedic hymns. However, since the number of such passages is only a dozen or so out

of more than a thousand, this fact in itself should not be exaggerated to claim that women enjoyed a very high status in society. A childless widow could cohabit with her brother-in-law until the birth of a son; the practice was known as *niyoga*. The institution of marriage seems to have been established. But we also have some evidence of incestuous relationships during the Rigvedic period. The dialogue between Yama and Yami in the later portion of the *Rigveda* is indicative of brother-sister union. Attention has also been drawn to other examples of incest in this text—those between father and daughter, and mother and son. These instances may be treated as survivals of a matrilineal society. Clearly then the mother-right was not completely submerged by the father-right in this period, but the overall patriarchal social ambience cannot be ignored.

It is likely that the early Aryans had some consciousness of their distinctive physical appearance. They were generally fair, and the indigenous people dark in complexion. The colour of their skin may have been an important mark of their identity. This provided the context for the use of the term *varna* (colour). Scholars of racist persuasion have blown this out of proportion to explain the emergence of the *varna* (caste) system. But the more important factor leading to the creation of social divisions was the conquest of the Dasas and Dasyus, who were assigned the status of slaves and shudras. Tribal chiefs and priests, who cornered a larger share of booty, acquiied greater power and prestige at the cost of their common kinsmen, thus giving rise to social inequalities. The gift of slaves to priests was made frequently; most of them being female slaves could, however, be employed only for domestic purposes and not for agricultural production or other productive activities. But all members of even the priestly class were not fortunate enough to receive lavish gifts. No wonder then that the brahmana Vamadeva laments his grim poverty: 'In the utmost need cooked I the entrails of a dog; among the gods I found no protection; I beheld my wife in degradation. . . .' Another indigent brahmana humbly implores Agni 'to accept his sacrifice of worm-eaten firewood, as he has no cow, nor even an axe'. We also hear of a brahmana who prays for the return of his wife forcibly abducted by the king.

In course of time the tribal society was divided into three groups, warriors (*rajanya*/kshatriya), priests (brahmana), and the common

people; the fourth division called the shudras appeared towards the end of the Rigvedic period, the term being derived from the name of one of the subjugated tribes. The fourfold social division into brahmana, kshatriya, vaishya, and shudra was given religious sanction. A late passage in the earliest Veda tells us that the brahmana emanated from the mouth of the primeval man, the kshatriya from his arms, the vaishya from his thighs, and the shudra from his feet. This may be a *post facto* rationalization of the occupations the various groups practised and of the position that they came to occupy in the social hierarchy. But occupational differentiation did not always coincide with social divisions in the Rigvedic period. We come across a family consisting of a poet son, his father a physician and his mother a grinder of corn.

Unequal distribution of the spoils of war was certainly the basic reason for the emergence of the fourfold division of society. But the phenomenon was also linked with the long process of acculturation between the local population and the Aryan migrants, of which there is considerable evidence. The Rigvedic vocabulary contains nearly 4 per cent words of the non-Aryan substrate language which was in use in a major part of north India before the advent of the Aryans. Assimilation of the non-Vedic elements is also borne out by the information available about some prominent individuals mentioned in the *Rigveda*. In a passage of the *Rigveda*, Vasishtha, who replaced Vishvamitra as the chief priest of Sudas and who later came to be treated as the founder of a major brahmana *gotra*, is said to have been born of the seed of the Vedic gods Mitra and Varuna; his mother is not mentioned. But in the one and the same account he is said to have been 'born of the mind of Urvashi', born also of a jar which received the combined semen of the two gods; and discovered 'clad in the lightening' in a *pushkara* (tank). Garbled versions of his birth may have been invented to gloss over his non-Vedic origin and to facilitate his adoption into the Rigvedic fold. Another prominent sage and the founder of a *gotra*, Agastya, who carried the Vedic religion to south India, was also born of a jar. Several seers like Kanva and Angiras are described in the *Rigveda* as black, which may point to their non-Vedic antecedents. Like the non-Aryan priesthood, some conquered chiefs were also assimilated and given high status. Such Dasa chiefs as Balbhuta and Taruksha are said to have made generous

gifts to the priests; they thus earned unstinted praise and gained in status in the Aryan social order. The *Rigveda* does not throw any light on the process of assimilation of the pre-Aryan or non-Aryan commoners into the Aryan fold. Perhaps most of the ordinary members of the aboriginal tribes were considered to be outside the pale of Aryan life and were reduced to the lowest position in society. Social distance between the Aryans and the 'dark-skinned, full-lipped, snub-nosed' non-Aryans increased over time. Not surprisingly they may have felt the need to retain the purity of their blood, little realizing that much non-Aryan blood was already flowing in their veins, just as some non-Aryan gods had wormed their way into the Vedic pantheon through syncretism.

The Rigvedic gods were predominantly male as was natural in a patriarchal society. Their number is stated to have been 33. Among them the greatest was Indra, who shared some of the characteristics of the Greek god Zeus. Always ready to smite dragons and demons, he is credited with the sacking of many 'forts' and is therefore called Purandara (breaker of forts). A warlord leading the Aryan tribes to victory against the demons, Indra is described as rowdy and amoral, and as fond of feasting and drinking Soma, which was the name of a heady drink as well as of the Vedic god of plants. The largest number of hymns—some 250 of them—in the *Rigveda* is addressed to Indra. His servants were the Gandharvas (heavenly musicians). Their female counterparts were the beautiful, libidinous, and seductive nymphs (*apsaras*). One of them, Urvashi, admitted to her earthly lover Pururvas that 'female comradeships do not exist' and has been associated with some kind of hetaerism. Next in importance was Agni (literally fire), who dwelt in the domestic hearth and acted as intermediary between gods and men; 200 hymns of the *Rigveda* are devoted to him. Varuna was third in importance after both Indra and Agni, though he was the upholder of the cosmic order (*rita*). Surya (the sun), Savitri (the deity to whom the famous *gayatri mantra* is addressed), and Pushan (guardian of roads, herdsmen and straying cattle) were the principal solar deities. Vishnu, a minor god, also had solar characteristics and was believed to have covered the earth in three steps. Some of the gods may be traced back to the period when the Aryans had not branched off from the Indo-European community. Amongst them Dyaus (the heavens personified) was the father-god, but he lost his

position of prominence in the Vedic pantheon. Some goddesses also find mention in the *Rigveda*, such as Ila, Aditi and Ushas, occupying a subordinate position in the early Vedic religion. The *Rigveda* mentions the female consorts of only the important gods. Indrani was the spouse of Indra, Varunani of Varuna, and Agnayi of Agni. Their names were derived from those of their husbands and they did not play a significant part in the early Vedic religion. According to one view the gods were generally not married, their wives being called *gnas* collectively. Whether this may be reminiscent of group marriage among the Aryans at some stage is a matter of speculation.

The favour of gods could be won through sacrifice (*yajna*). The Rigvedic Aryans performed a number of domestic and public sacrifices, many of them traceable to their Indo-European past. A passage from the *Rigveda* tells us that creation emanated from the first cosmic sacrifice. Prajapati (later known as Brahma) is thought of as a primeval man. He is said to have been sacrificed to himself by the gods who were apparently his children; and it was from the body of the divine victim that the universe was produced. This underscores the necessity of sacrifice for the maintenance of the world order. The sacrifices mentioned in the *Rigveda* give us an idea of the food offered to gods: milk, butter, barley, oxen, goats and sheep were their usual food. though some of them had apparently their preferences. Indra, for example, had a special liking for the flesh of bulls. Agni was not a tippler like Indra, but was fond of the flesh of horses, bulls and cows, and the toothless god Pushan, the guardian of the roads, ate mush as a Hobson's choice. The offerings made to the gods throw much light on the Rigvedic world of sacrifice, but the real development of the sacrificial cult took place in the second phase of Aryan expansion in India.

Great changes occurred in the Aryan mode of life during the later Vedic age, extending from 1000 to 600 BC when the three Vedas, *Yajur, Sama* and *Atharva*, the Brahmanas and a few early Upanishads were composed. The later Vedic works show a wider knowledge of Indian geography than is found in the *Rigveda*. They mention the 'two seas', the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. Several Himalayan peaks are also mentioned. The Vindhya mountains are indirectly referred to. It would appear that during the period of the composition of the later Vedic texts the Aryans became generally familiar with the major

portion of the Gangetic plains where they gradually settled.

During the later Vedic period the Aryans shifted the scene of their activity from Panjab to nearly the whole of present-day western Uttar Pradesh covered by the Ganga-Yamuna doab. The Bharata and the Purus, the two important tribes, came together and formed the Kuru people. From the fringes of the doab they moved to its upper portion called Kurukshetra or the land of the Kurus. Later they coalesced with the Panchalas. Together the Kurus and the Panchalas occupied Delhi, and the upper and middle parts of the Ganga-Yamuna divide, and established their capital at Hastinapur (Meerut district).

Towards the end of the later Vedic period the Vedic people moved further east to Koshala in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Videha in north Bihar. In the course of this eastward movement they encountered copper-using groups which used a distinctive pottery called Ochre Coloured pottery, as well as people associated by archaeologists with the use of Black-and-Red Ware. They now seemed to have lost touch with their old home in the Panjab. References to the region in the later Vedic texts are rare; the few that exist describe it as an impure land where Vedic sacrifices were no longer performed. Kurukshetra, however, is remembered as a place of sacrifices to the gods.

According to one view the main line of Aryan thrust eastward was along the Himalayan foothills, north of the Ganga. But expansion in the area south of this river cannot be precluded. Initially the land was cleared by means of fire. In a famous passage of the *Shatapatha Brahmana* we are told that Agni moved eastward, burning the earth until he reached the river Sadanira, the present-day Gandak. There he stopped. In his wake came the chieftain Videgha Mathava, who caused the fire god to cross over the river. Thus the land of Videha was Aryanized; and it took its name from its colonizer. The legend may be treated as a significant account of the process of land clearance by burning, leading to the founding of new settlements by migrating warrior-agriculturalist. Burning may have been supplemented by the use of the iron axe for cutting the forests in some areas. This metal is referred to in the later Vedic literature as *shyama ayas* (dark or black metal) and has also been found at excavated sites like Atranjikhera and Jakhera in western Uttar Pradesh and adjoining regions, whose dates fall in the time bracket of the later Vedic period. The number of

iron agricultural tools and implements is less than that of the weapons. On this basis some scholars who see no relationship between technological development and social change have altogether denied the importance of iron technology in facilitating the clearance of land.

Numerous shards of Painted Grey Ware have been discovered both in association with iron objects as well as independently at many places in western Uttar Pradesh and adjoining regions. The number of these sites would easily exceed 700 in the upper Gangetic basin, though only a few of them have been excavated so far. The pottery known as Painted Grey Ware has been generally associated with the later Vedic people and from the sites excavated so far one gets the impression that the nomadism of the early Aryan migrants was considerably undermined. They lived a settled life in their wattle-and-daub houses erected on wooden poles, domesticated animals, and practised agriculture more extensively than before. In the hymns desire is frequently expressed for increase in cattle, which still constituted the principal form of movable property. Agriculture, however, tended to become the chief means of livelihood in the period; and the idea of private possession of land gradually began to crystallize. The *Shatapatha Brahmana* devotes an entire section to rites connected with ploughing and enumerates various agricultural operations. References to the yoking of six, eight, twelve, and twenty-four oxen to the plough indicate the practice of deep ploughing. The *Atharvaveda* describes a ritual for leading river-water into new channels; it also speaks of spells to avoid drought and excessive rains. The buffalo seems to have been tamed for agriculture. In addition to barley, the chief crop cultivated during the period was wheat (*godhuma*), which continues to be the staple food in the Panjab and Uttar Pradesh to this day. Rice (*vrihi*) is mentioned for the first time, though very likely it was not an important crop in the upper Gangetic basin at this stage. Beans and sesamum were also known; the latter assumed ritual importance in course of time. All this does not mean a total disappearance of pastoralism, which continued to remain a reasonably prominent feature of life. This is suggested not only by the remains of cattle bones bearing cutmarks at Hastinapur, Atranjikhera, etc., but also by the later Vedic texts, especially the *Shatapatha Brahmana*, which refers to Yajnavalkya's obdurate statement in favour of eating

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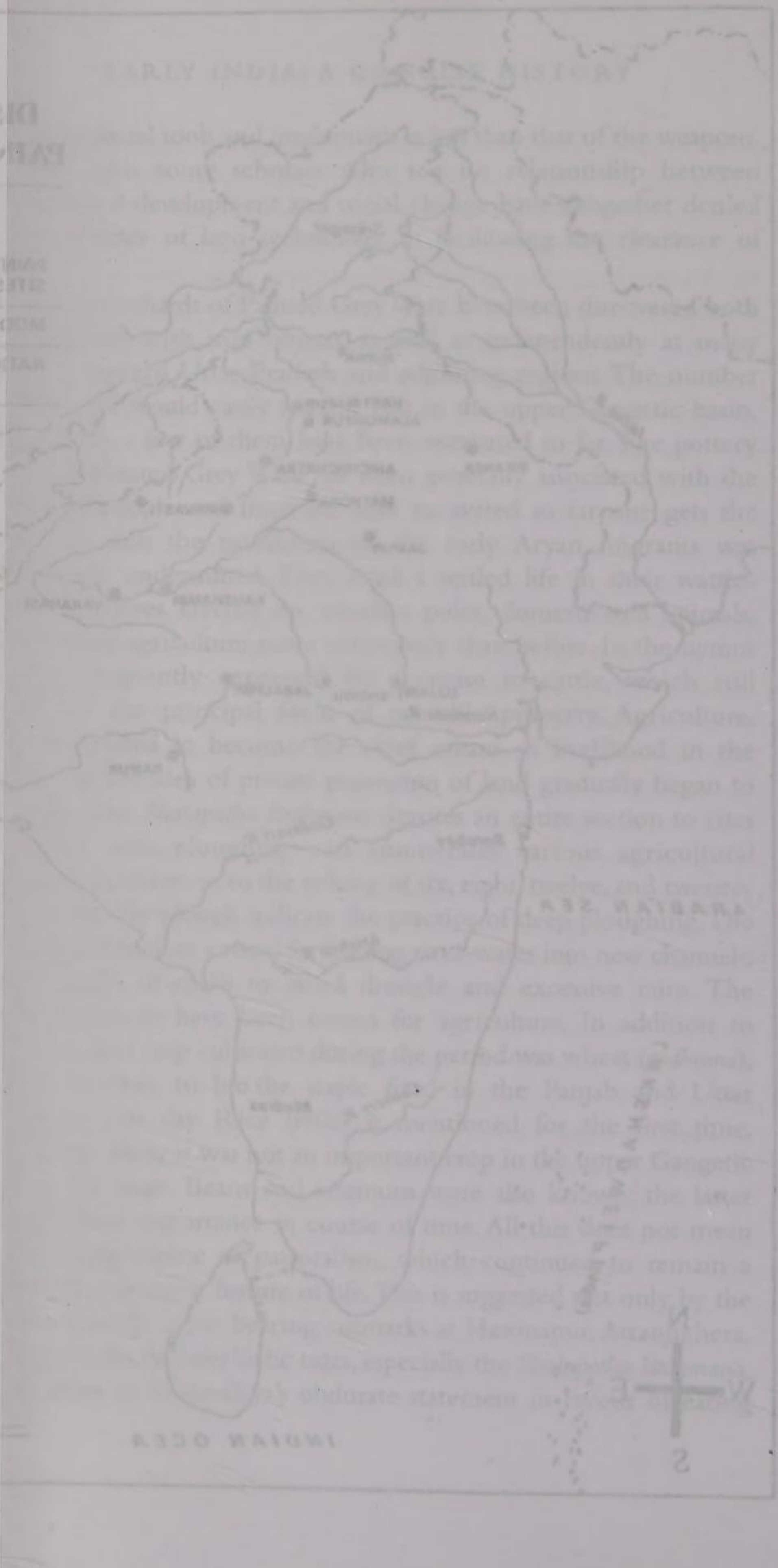


beef. Nevertheless the growing importance of agriculture undoubtedly undermined the earlier pastoral economy, which could not adequately feed an increasing population.

Simultaneously with the transition from a pastoral to an agricultural economy there arose several new arts and crafts. Many of these are enumerated in the later Vedic literature. Mention may be made of smeltering, smithery or carpentry, weaving, leather-working, jewellery-making, dyeing, and pottery-making. It is difficult to say how far smelters and smiths were connected with iron-working. Probably they worked mostly in copper, which continued to predominate, iron still being rare. Weaving was practised on a wide scale and perhaps remained confined mostly to women. Leather-work, pottery, and carpentry were connected with building activities, of which we have some evidence in this period. Glass hoards and bangles found in the course of excavations provide evidence of working in glass; these objects may have been used as prestige items by a limited number of people. The later Vedic texts refer not only to various arts and crafts, indicating progress in the differentiation of economic functions, but also to the seas and to sea voyages. All this indicates the rudimentary beginning of some kind of commerce in which the vaishyas participated. Reference to money lending first occurs in the *Shatapatha Brahmana*, which describes a usurer as *kusidin*, though definite evidence of the use of money is lacking. The term *nishka* occurring in contemporary literature has sometimes been taken to mean a coin, but so far no actual specimens of coins of this period have come to light.

With the increasing importance of agriculture and the diversification of artisanal activity, the later Vedic people gradually relegated to the background their pastoralist and semi-nomadic subsistence strategies. Their life became settled and sedentary and they could perhaps produce enough for themselves and, to a certain extent, for the support of the priests and the ruling class. But they do not seem to have produced an adequate surplus for the consumption of the people engaged in non-agricultural specialized crafts and occupations. They could not therefore contribute to the growth of towns and, despite textual references to *nagara*, the faint beginnings of urbanization can be seen only towards the end of the later Vedic period when Hastinapur (Meerut) and Kaushambi (Allahabad) emerged as rudimentary towns.

Settled life led to a further crystallization of the fourfold division of society. Initially one of the sixteen classes of priests, the brahmanas emerged as the most important and claimed social and ritual privileges on account of the ever growing cult of sacrifice and ritual performed for their clients and patrons (mostly the *rajanyas*/kshatriyas). The kshatriyas constituted the warrior class and came to be looked upon as protectors; the king was chosen from among them. The vaishyas devoted themselves to trade, agriculture, and various crafts and were the tax-paying class. The shudras were supposed to serve the three higher *varnas* and formed the bulk of the labouring masses. Most likely the community exercised some sort of general control over them; in this sense they may be compared with the helots of Sparta. Shudras were not owned by members of the upper classes as slaves, the evidence for whose existence in the greater part of the Vedic period is lacking. A text speaks of ten thousand women slaves captured from various countries and given by Anga to his brahmana priest; but there is no mention of men slaves. Obviously their number was far too small to attract any notice.

With the emergence of the caste system certain social norms developed. Marriage between the members of the same *gotra* was not permitted. This rule applied especially to brahmanas, who were by now divided into exogamous *gotra* groups. Members of the higher *varnas* could marry shudra women. But marriage between men of the lower orders and women of the upper *varnas* was discountenanced. This was due to the gradual strengthening of *varna* distinctions, which began to appear in social life. A special position was claimed for brahmanas and kshatriyas, distinguishing them from vaishyas and shudras—a tendency which became pronounced in later centuries. Although rules restricting interdining between the higher and the lower orders had not yet evolved, the first signs of the extreme form of social exclusion manifesting itself as untouchability in subsequent times began to appear in this period; autochthonous people like the Chandalas and Paulkasas were objects of spite and abhorrence.

The family became increasingly patriarchal; the birth of a son was more welcome than that of a daughter who was often considered a source of misery. Princes could take several wives, though polyandry was also prevalent. The origin of the late practice of *sati* (self-immolation by the widow at her husband's funeral pyre) has sometimes

been traced to this period. But this claim does not have much basis; for we hear of the remarriage of widows (*niyoga*). In a contemporary text woman is classed with dice and wine as one of the three chief evils. A good woman, the *Aitareya Brahmana* tells us, is one who does not talk back; and in this period women ceased to participate in the deliberations of the tribal council called the *sabha*. Yet the early marriage of girls had not yet become customary, and here and there they attended lectures by gurus and learnt the Vedas. Gargi Vachaknavi is said to have attended a discussion with the sage Yajnavalkya and even to have embarrassed him by her searching questions.

The material and social developments of the age were amply reflected in the contemporary political system. Kingship underwent much change. Its earlier tribal character came to be diluted, with increasing emphasis on the territorial aspect of the institution. In a passage of the *Atharvaveda* the *rashtra* (territory) is said to have been held by the king and made firm by the king Varuna, and the gods Brihaspati, Indra, and Agni. The coronation ceremony called *rajasuya*, for which a fixed place was necessary, is said to have extended over two years. The territorial aspect of kingship is clear from a text which enumerates ten forms of government prevalent in different parts of the country. Unlike the earlier period, kings now ruled over territories and not over nomadic groups moving from place to place.

Several kingdoms came to be established. In the Kuru-Panchala (Delhi-Meerut-Mathura) region the Kurus ruled from Hastinapur where excavations have revealed settlements belonging to the period 1000-700 BC. They fought a fratricidal war with their collaterals, the Pandavas, in 950 BC, at Kurukshetra, near Delhi; its magnified version formed the theme of the great epic *Mahabharata*, compiled much later around the fourth century AD. To the east of the Ganga-Yamuna confluence, there existed the kingdom of Koshala. Rama, the hero of the *Ramayana*, came to be associated with it. Neither he nor his father Dasharatha figures in contemporary literature; it is a different matter that in our own times his overzealous devotees have unashamedly politicized his image to damage the social fabric of contemporary India. East of Koshala was Videha. Its king bore the title Janaka, which is mentioned more than once in the later Vedic texts. South of Videha, on the southern side of the Ganga, was the kingdom of Magadha, then of little importance.

Territorial monarchy derived strength from taxation, which was introduced in this period. Settled life and relatively stable agriculture led to the production of a moderate surplus, and this could be collected by the king in the form of taxes paid in grain and cattle, and most probably not regularly. In the *Shatapatha Brahmana* the king is described as a devourer of the people (*vishamatta*), because he lived on what was realized from them. This presents a contrast to the earlier period when he thrived on voluntary tributes and offerings. An official called the *bhagadugha*, who collected the royal share of the produce, is mentioned in the later Vedic texts.

The income from taxes enabled the king to appoint administrative officers. We hear of twelve *ratnins* (jewel-bearers), whose houses the king visited at the time of his coronation in order to offer oblations to the appropriate deity in each residence. Probably they were high functionaries and looked after metal-working, chariot-making, chariot-driving, etc. The list includes an officer-in-charge of the royal treasury (*samgrahitri*) and the chief priest (*purohita*). These officers were under the direct control of the king and were maintained out of the taxes and tributes collected from the people. Although there was no standing army, the growth of the royal entourage enhanced the power and prestige of the king.

The vicissitudes of the Vedic assemblies also contributed to the enhancement of the king's power. The *vidatha* disappeared completely; the other two, the *sabha* and the *samiti*, lost their importance. In the emergent territorial states with jurisdiction over comparatively larger areas, ordinary people could hardly afford to travel long distances to attend the meetings of the popular assemblies. Those who may have attended such meetings were either chiefs or wealthy members of society. This gave an aristocratic character to the *sabha* and *samiti* and took away much of their effectiveness. They lost some of their activities to the new officials called the *ratnins*.

What may have added substantially to royal authority was that kingship ceased to be elective. The coronation rituals of the period are reminiscent of the earlier elective nature of the king's office. But one text prescribes formulae for extending kingship for one, two, and three generations, another for ten generations. Thus kingship became hereditary and gained in power. A religious aura was created around the person of the king by invoking various gods at the consecration

ceremony to endow him with their respective qualities; in the rituals he was sometimes also represented as a god.

The king derived much ideological support from the emerging brahmana class. In a passage of the *Atharvaveda* he is described as the protector of the brahmanas and the eater of the people. He is required to give a pledge to the brahmana priest that he would stand by the law. Another text states that the king and the *shrotriya* (learned brahmana) together would uphold *dharma*; other sections of society are not mentioned. This suggests some kind of understanding and cooperation between the priests and the warriors; the necessity of this arrangement is stressed by the *Shatapatha Brahmana*. Despite occasional references to conflicts between the princes and the priests, from now on priests began to be subservient to rulers so as to strike mephistophelean bargains.

With increasing royal pretensions and rising priestly ambitions there took place a great development in the sacrificial cult. Several new and lengthy royal sacrifices developed, and instructions for their meticulous performance occupy much space in the later Vedic literature. The *vajapeya* (drink of strength) sacrifice lasted seventeen days to a year, and was believed not only to restore the strength of a middle-aged king but also to raise him from the position of a simple *raja* to the status of a *samrat*, a monarch who owed allegiance to none and who controlled several kings. The *rajasuya* or royal consecration was another complex sacrifice; the honorarium paid to the presiding priest in extreme cases amounted to 240,000 cows. The most famous, significant, and complex royal sacrifice was the *ashvamedha* (horse sacrifice), which lasted for three days, although the preparatory ceremonies extended over a year or even two. Four officiants, four wives of the king with their 400 attendants, and a large number of spectators took part. A specially consecrated horse was set free to roam at will for a year, escorted by a chosen band of 400 warriors so that any king trying to capture the animal might be combated. The horse was brought back to the capital at the end of the year and sacrificed along with 600 animals including cows, bulls, goats, deer, etc. The king's wives walked around the carcass; the chief queen lay down beside it simulating copulation. The ceremony concluded with a sacrifice of 21 sterile cows and the distribution of fabulous fees to the priests. The horse sacrifice was supposed to confer victory and

sovereignty, and because of this, it was performed sporadically in later times. Apart from this, domestic rites consisting of small sacrifices with simple rituals were also performed in the later Vedic period.

Elaborate sacrificial rites undermined the importance of the Rigvedic gods, some of whom faded into the background. The priests became the chief beneficiaries of the sacrifices and consequently gained in power. Cattle were slaughtered at sacrifices, often in large numbers. Animal bones with cut marks found in the course of excavations at Atranjikhera and other places are mostly of cattle. Public rituals therefore led to the decimation of the cattle wealth, whose importance for the developing agricultural economy can hardly be overestimated.

The first reaction to Brahmanical dominance and the extremely ritualistic later Vedic religion can be seen in the Upanishads, which questioned the efficacy of animal sacrifice and gave primacy to asceticism as a means of achieving salvation, read new meanings in the sacrifice, and propounded the doctrine of *ahimsa*.* The Upanishadic thought reflects a wider spirit of enquiry prevalent towards the end of the Vedic period and centres around the idea of soul (*atman*) and not sacrifice (*yajna*). Creation is said to have grown out of the primeval desire of the World Soul. In the Upanishads we find the first clear exposition of belief in the passage of the soul from life to life. Souls were thought of as being born to happiness or sorrow according to their conduct in the previous life. From this evolved the theory of *karma* (action), which preached that the deeds of one life affected the next. This doctrine sought to provide an explanation of human suffering, and became fundamental to most later Indian thought.

By the time of the Upanishads asceticism had become fairly

*The word *ahimsa/ahimsayai* finds mention in several later Vedic and post-Vedic texts but there is a wide divergence of scholarly opinion regarding the origin of the idea of non-violence. According to one view, it first occurs in the sense of a new doctrine in the teachings of Ghora Angirasa in the *Chhandogya Upanishad,* and according to another it originated in the Indus Valley civilization. A third view, however, explains the origin of *ahimsa* as rooted in the horror of killing and in this sense non-violence 'is a selfish action, not altruism and love for all beings . . . a prudent action taken in one's own interest . . . not necessarily a Jaina, Buddhist, or an 'aboriginal' development at all, but one which has its roots in much earlier Brahmanical thought.'

widespread. Ascetics lived either as solitary hermits or in small groups away from society. Living off its resources, they could not have created a counter-culture in a real sense, as has been suggested by some scholars. Nevertheless through self-training the hermit acquired magical power, formerly ascribed to sacrifices. Asceticism thus challenged the supremacy of the Vedic sacrifice (*yajna*) and of the brahmanas who chiefly profited from it. The brahmanas by way of compromise invented a formula by which the life of an individual was divided into four stages (*ashramas*). First he was to be a *brahmacharin*, leading a celibate and austere life as a student at his teacher's house. Having learnt the Vedas or a part of them he was married, and became a householder (*grihastha*). When well advanced in age, he withdrew from worldly life to become an ascetic (*vanaprastha*). Finally in the ultimate phase of his life, having freed his soul from material ties by meditation and self-torture, he became a wandering ascetic (*sanyasin*). In this artificial scheme, asceticism was recommended at the end of a man's life so that he could discharge his social responsibilities before taking to it.

The four *ashramas* were not meant for the shudras. Nor was education allowed to the members of the lower *varnas*. Education began with an investiture ceremony (*upanayana*, literally 'leading forth of a boy for study under a teacher'), whereby a boy was initiated as a full member of the society. It was confined to brahmanas, kshatriyas, and vaishyas; the shudras were not entitled to it. In Vedic times girls were also sometimes initiated. Since the rite was thought of as accomplishing a second birth, members of the three higher *varnas* were described by the epithet *dvija* (twice-born), though later many kshatriyas and vaishyas ceased to perform the initiation ceremony.

Theoretically education was open to all *dvijas*, though the Vedas tended to become an exclusive preserve of the brahmanas. The student (*brahmacharin*) was trained at the home of a brahmana teacher for a number of years; the Vedas constituted the main object of study. Education was imparted orally and learning was by rote; oral transmission of knowledge has been, in fact, an integral part of Indian tradition. A late Rigvedic passage draws a lively comparison between the pupils repeating lessons after the teacher and frogs gathering and croaking in the rainy season. The student was required to memorize the scriptures syllable by syllable; and the brahmanas developed a unique system of mnemonics. But unlike the Harappans, the Vedic

people do not seem to have used a script. There is no clear reference to writing in the entire body of Vedic literature. The earliest surviving specimens of a decipherable script are found in the inscriptions of Ashoka (third century BC) written in Brahmi, which presupposes several centuries of development.

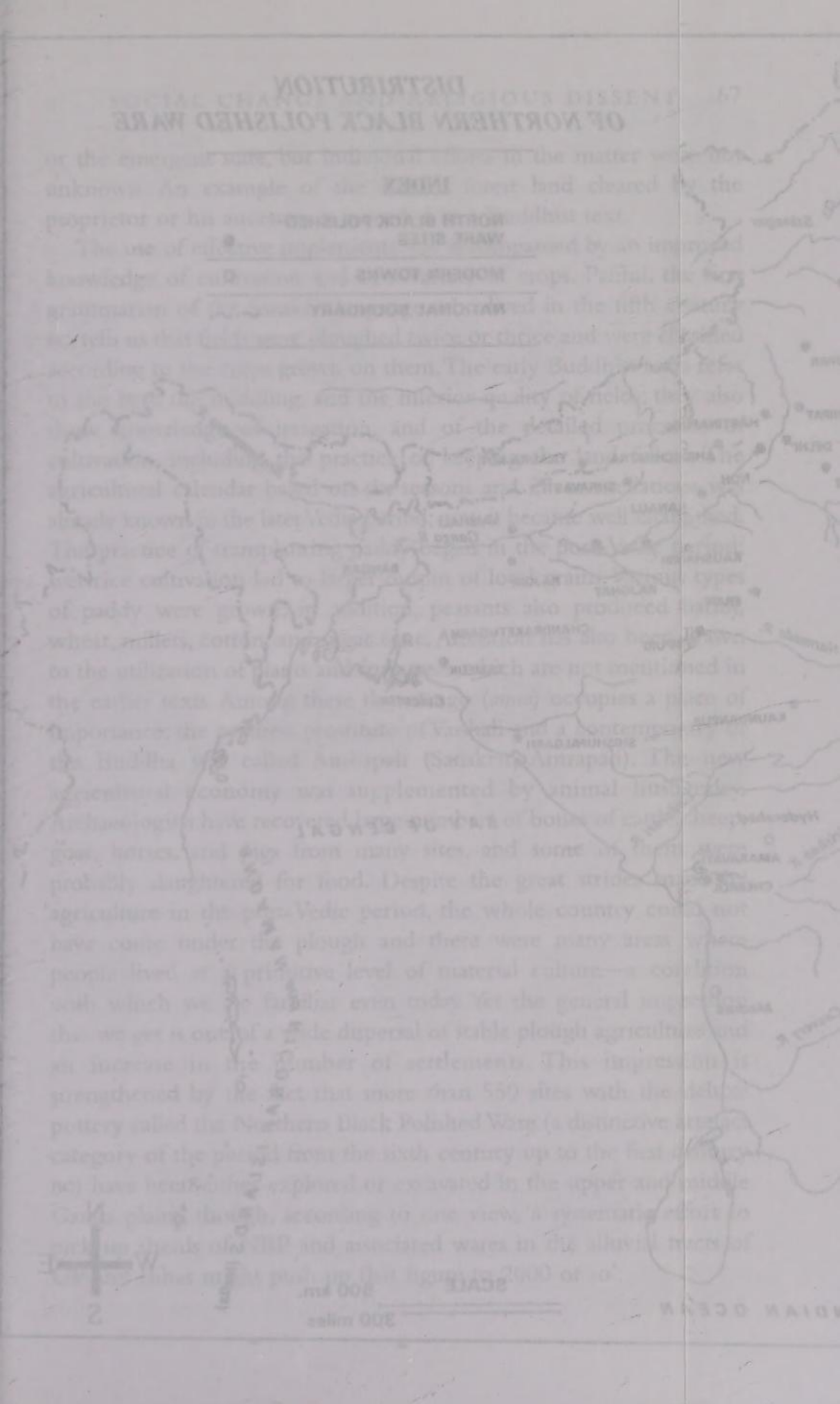
CHAPTER 4

Social Change and Religious Dissent: Jainism and Buddhism

The colonization of the middle Gangetic plains by the Vedic people and related developments in the second half of the first millennium BC can be studied with the help of diverse sources. The early Pali texts composed by Buddhists are of much value. The *Vinaya Pitaka* dealing with the rules of the Buddhist Samgha, the *Sutta Pitaka* or collection of the Buddha's sermons, and the *Abhidhamma Pitaka* devoted to the discussion of metaphysical problems, throw light on changing patterns of life and thought. Scholars have often differed on the chronology of these Pitakas and of the 551 Buddhist birth stories called the Jatakas, which form part of the *Sutta Pitaka*. But major portions of these texts may be placed between 600 and 400 BC, while the Jataka stories by and large may be assigned a later date. The Pali works were written in the language of Magadha and, therefore, reflect mainly the conditions obtaining in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. They are generally reliable for all of northern India if considered in conjunction with the grammar of Panini (500-400 BC) and the Grihyasutras and Dharmasutras which generally belong to 600-300 BC. Archaeologists have also brought to light a vast bulk of evidence. During the last five decades they have dug up various places such as Ahichchhatra, Hastinapur, Kaushambi, Ujjaini, Shravasti, Vaishali, and many more which find mention in the texts. In the process they have discovered the remains of houses, buildings, and towns. They have also found a variety of objects, including a deluxe pottery called the Northern Black Polished Ware. Archaeological material interpreted in the light of the literary texts provides a clue to the understanding of the major social and economic transformation in north-east India, including eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in the second half of the first millennium BC, which saw the penetration of

the Vedic people into this region and the introduction of a new agricultural economy in the area.

The middle Gangetic basin has had an average annual rainfall between 114 and 140 cm. It was thickly forested around the sixth-fifth centuries BC as can be inferred from references to the four great forests (*maha-aranyas*) and from the derivation of some modern place names. For example, Arrah is derived from ancient Aranya (forest), Saran from Naimisharanya, and Champaran from Champaranya. Similarly, most cities associated with early Buddhism are named after some plant. The large-scale colonization and the spread of agriculture in an area under a thick forest cover was possible on account of the greater use of iron tools and implements for clearing the land as well as for various agricultural operations. The use of bellows, hammer, anvil, etc., made possible the manufacture of iron tools and implements on a large scale. Not surprisingly, textual references to iron ploughshares are many; and archaeological evidence, though comparatively weak, is not altogether absent. Leaving aside the iron ploughshares found at Ropar and Jakhera in the preceding period, it is noteworthy that these have also been discovered at Kaushambi (Allahabad) and at Raghuasoi, a place near Vaishali in Bihar, in post-Vedic times. Besides, an impressive amount of iron slag and iron objects (which include axes, sickles, and chisels) have been unearthed at Rajghat (Banaras). The number of agricultural tools and implements discovered in excavations may not be very large but this may be due to the moist and corrosive nature of the soil in the middle Gangetic plains. The mention of the *kuddala* (hoe/spade) and *kuddalika* (one who earns his livelihood with the help of this tool) in a Brahmanical text suggests that the use of the iron ploughshare was supplemented by that of the iron hoe. All this indicates the diffusion of iron technology. More importantly, the available evidence convincingly proves that iron tools and implements were used for purposes other than war and certainly for clearing forests and bringing more and more land under the plough with the help of iron ploughshares that made deep ploughing possible, with the consequent proliferation of territorial settlements. The clearance of forests received scriptural sanction. According to a lawgiver, the king could injure fruit and flower-bearing trees for the extension of agriculture and for sacrifice. The main initiative in extending the area of cultivation may have come from the community



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or the emergent state, but individual efforts in the matter were not unknown. An example of the sale of forest land cleared by the proprietor or his ancestors is recorded in a Buddhist text.

The use of effective implements was accompanied by an improved knowledge of cultivation and of a variety of crops. Panini, the first grammarian of the Sanskrit language who lived in the fifth century BC, tells us that fields were ploughed twice or thrice and were classified according to the crops grown on them. The early Buddhist texts refer to the best, the middling, and the inferior quality of fields; they also show knowledge of irrigation, and of the detailed processes of cultivation, including the practice of keeping the land fallow. The agricultural calendar based on six seasons and 27 constellations was already known in the later Vedic period; now it became well established. The practice of transplanting paddy began in the post-Vedic period; wet rice cultivation led to larger output of local grains. Various types of paddy were grown; in addition, peasants also produced barley, wheat, millets, cotton, and sugar cane. Attention has also been drawn to the utilization of plants and fruit trees which are not mentioned in the earlier texts. Among these the mango (*amra*) occupies a place of importance; the prettiest prostitute of Vaishali and a contemporary of the Buddha was called Ambapali (Sanskrit, Amrapali). The new agricultural economy was supplemented by animal husbandry. Archaeologists have recovered large numbers of bones of cattle, sheep, goat, horses, and pigs from many sites, and some of them were probably slaughtered for food. Despite the great strides made by agriculture in the post-Vedic period, the whole country could not have come under the plough and there were many areas where people lived at a primitive level of material culture—a condition with which we are familiar even today. Yet the general impression that we get is one of a wide dispersal of stable plough agriculture and an increase in the number of settlements. This impression is strengthened by the fact that more than 550 sites with the deluxe pottery called the Northern Black Polished Ware (a distinctive artefact category of the period from the sixth century up to the first century BC) have been either explored or excavated in the upper and middle Ganga plains, though, according to one view, 'a systematic effort to pick up sherds of NBP and associated wares in the alluvial tracts of UP and Bihar might push up that figure to 2000 or so'.

Improved knowledge of cultivation and the use of effective implements enabled peasants to produce greater surpluses, which helped the growth of towns. Jaina canonical writings mention different kinds of urban centres in the age of Mahavira. In the fourth century BC Aristobulus, who was sent on a commission by Alexander, claimed that he saw the remains of more than a thousand towns in the Indus area. Even if this is an exaggeration there is little doubt that many towns sprang up in northern India. Taking the country as a whole, nearly sixty towns are assigned to the period 600-300 BC. Shravasti was one of the twenty big cities, and six of them were important enough to be associated with the passing away of Gautama Buddha. These were Champa (Bhagalpur in Bihar), Rajagriha (nearly 96 km south of Patna), Saketa (in eastern Uttar Pradesh), Kaushâmbi (64 km from Allahabad), Banaras, and Kushinara (Kasia in the Deoria district of Uttar Pradesh). The existence of no less than ten urban centres in the middle Ganga basin during 600-300 BC is proved by both archaeology and contemporary literature. Thus, a remarkable beginning of town life in north-eastern India seems to have taken place around the sixth century BC.

An important factor that helped the growth of towns was the movement of Alexander's army from mainland Greece to India. It opened up a number of trade routes and revealed the possibilities of mercantile relations between north-west India and West Asia. Besides, routes to the Deccan and south India offered new markets for north Indian commodities. The discovery of Northern Black Polished Ware, whose epicentre was the Gangetic valley, and iron objects assignable to the pre-Maurya period in the northern Deccan, suggests some kind of commercial contact. But the main trade routes were along the Ganga, from Rajagriha to Kaushambi, which connected Ujjain (in Madhya Pradesh) with Broach, the chief port for sea trade with the West; the route from Kaushambi leading across the Panjab to Taxila was an outlet for India's overland trade with the north-west.

Trade was both the cause and effect of increasing urbanization. The Jatakas, the Buddhist birth stories, make numerous references to caravans with 500 or 1,000 carts going from one place to another. One such group of 500 carts is mentioned as passing by a street where Gautama Buddha was meditating. On his way to Rajagriha the Buddha is said to have met Belattha, who was going toward Andhakovinda (an unidentified place) with 500 wagons filled with

Plate 3: Punch-marked coins.

jars of sugar. Merchants such as horse dealers from Uttarapatha are described as moving from one place to another to sell their goods. Cloth seems to have been an important article of trade, for the early Pali texts suggest that cotton came into general use in north-eastern India in the age of the Buddha. But trade was mainly confined to luxury articles.

Trade received a great fillip with the use of metal coins in the post-Vedic period. In spite of Vedic testimony, the prevalence of coins in the preceding period remains extremely doubtful. The earliest coins discovered in India cannot be dated beyond the time of the Buddha. These coins were issued by merchants and bore punch-marks, whence the term 'punch-marked' is used to describe them. According to one view, more than three hundred hoards of punch-marked coins are known. Many of these have been found in the middle Ganga plains, indicating a reasonably high level of monetization of the region. The use of coins in this period seems to have become so common that even the price of a dead mouse is stated in terms of money.

The growth of towns, the expansion of trade, and the rise of a money economy are closely linked with the development of diverse arts and crafts which had their beginnings in the earlier period. Apart from such service occupations as those of the washerman and dyer, the painter, the barber, the weaver, and the cook, several manufacturing crafts are also mentioned in the early Buddhist texts. There was the reed worker, the potter, the vehicle maker, the needle maker, the goldsmith, the metalsmith, the carpenter, the ivory maker, the garland maker, and the silk manufacturer. The existence of so many crafts implies an increasing specialization in the field of commodity production.

Artisans and craftsmen were very often organized into guilds. Later Buddhist literature refers to the existence of eighteen guilds in Rajagriha, though the names of only four—wood workers, smiths, leather workers, and painters—are specified. Each guild inhabited a particular section of the town. This led not only to the localization of crafts and industries but also to their hereditary transmission from father to son. Every guild was presided over by a head (*jetthaka*). The *setthis*, who sometimes also headed the guilds, handled trade and industries. They generally lived in towns, but those among them who were granted revenues of villages for their maintenance (*bhogagama*)

by the king had to maintain links with the countryside. The *setthi* was in some sense a financier or banker and sometimes also the head of a trade guild. He was treated with respect even by absolute and despotic kings. All this implies that in the towns artisans and *setthis* were emerging as important social groups.

In the countryside also a new social group was coming to the forefront by virtue of its wealth. The greater part of land came to be owned by *gahapatis* (peasant proprietors). In the earlier period the word *gahapati* (literally, the lord of the house) stood for the host and principal sacrificer at any considerable sacrifice. But in the age of the Buddha it came to mean the head of a large patriarchal household of any caste who got respect primarily because of his wealth. In the post-Vedic period wealth was measured not so much in cattle as in land. References to several affluent *gahapatis* occur in the early Buddhist writings. The *gahapati* Mendaka is described as paying wages to the royal army; as a donor he is said to have instituted 1,250 cowherds to serve the Buddha and his Samgha. Anathapindika, another *gahapati*, is said to have paid a fabulous price for Jetavana, a plot of land which he donated to the Buddha. A *gahapati* of Saketa is referred to as giving 16,000 coins and a male and a female slave to the physician Jivaka; another *gahapati* of Banaras is reported to have given 16,000 coins to him for curing his son. Sometimes *gahapatis* are also represented as lending money to promising shopkeepers. The emergence of the *gahapati* from the Vedic householder to a comparatively wealthy head of the household may indicate the growing disparity of wealth within the society. Common people, slaves, and labourers seem to have coveted his wealth and wished him harm; often he is depicted as maintaining a bodyguard to defend himself.

The rise of a new wealthy class in villages and towns caused economic inequalities, which further undermined the tribal ideals of kinship and equality. Many tribes of the Vedic period were affected by the concentration of private property in the hands of fewer persons. This naturally tended to strengthen the fourfold division of society. The social, legal, and economic privileges of the higher castes, and the disabilities of the lower ones were for the first time defined in the Brahmanical lawbooks during post-Vedic times. Many aboriginal tribes which remained unaffected by the knowledge of iron technology lived at a very low level of material culture. The cultural gap between the autochthons, living mainly as hunters and fowlers, and the *varna*

divided society which possessed the knowledge of iron implements and agriculture, perhaps led in the post-Vedic period to the growth of untouchability. However, interaction between the literate Brahmanical social order and pre- and non-literate people has, despite the growth of the various forms of social marginality, continued throughout Indian history and has made Indian society what it is.

The newly developed features of the social and economic life of the people did not fit in with the Vedic ritualism and animal sacrifice, which had become a source of senseless decimation of cattle wealth, the main basis of the new plough agriculture. The conflict between Vedic religious practices and the aspirations of the rising social groups led to the search for new religious and philosophical ideas which could better fit with the basic changes in the material life of the people. Thus, in the sixth century BC in the Gangetic valley there emerged many new religious teachers who preached against the Vedic religion. The Buddhist sources speak of as many as 62 religious sects, and the Jaina texts refer to 363 sects in the sixth century BC. Of these many were based on regional customs and rituals. But some of them may have formed the basis of later philosophical ideas. Thus, Ajita Keshakambalin propagated a thorough-going materialistic doctrine called annihilationism (*uchchhedavada*) from which the Lokayata or Charvaka* school of philosophy is believed to have derived a great deal: Pakudha Katyayana, another religious leader, held that just as the

* The Lokayata (literally, widespread in the world) philosophy was supposed to have been popular among the people. The *Brihaspatisutra* (also the *Lakayatasutra*), on which much of India's materialist thinking was based, existed in some form as early as the second century BC, as can be inferred from Patanjali's reference to it. But it is now irretrievably lost. The only materialist philosophical text that has survived is the *Tattvoplavasimha* written by a certain Jayarashi in the eighth century. Materialism, however, remained an important undercurrent of Indian thought. The Lokayatikas were thought of as preaching unabashed Epicureanism and were, therefore, viewed with scorn by the orthodox. From the early centuries of the Christian era, the Lokayata philosophy came to be increasingly associated with Charvaka, who is supposed to have been a pupil of Brihaspati. In the *Mahabharata* the brahmana Charvaka is described as reproaching Yudhishthira for having killed his kinsmen in the war of succession. It is significant that in the crucial passage other brahmanas treat him as a demon in disguise and burn him to ashes.

earth, water, air, and light are the primary indestructible elements, so are sorrow, happiness, and life; it has been suggested that the later Vaisheshika school originated from his ideas. Purana Kassappa, still another contemporary preacher, regarded the soul as distinct from the body and laid the foundations of what came to be known as the Samkhya system of philosophy. His immediate following, however, merged into that of Makkhali Gosala, the exponent of the Ajivika sect, who drank, went naked, and practised orgiastic sexual rituals and who believed that the soul had to pass through an immutable cycle of predetermined rebirths, irrespective of any action by the particular body to which it was attached in each birth.

Of all the sects prevalent in northern India around the sixth century BC, only Jainism and Buddhism came to stay in India as independent religions. Jaina ideas were already being circulated in the seventh century BC by Parshva, to whom four fundamental principles of Jainism are ascribed. They are: taking no life (*ahimsa*), taking no property from others, possessing no property of one's own, and truthfulness. Mahavira added celibacy to this list.

Vardhamana Mahavira, who belonged to the Jnatri kshatriya clan, was born in a suburb of Vaishali called Kundagrama. His father Siddhartha was a wealthy noble; his mother Trishala was the sister of a Lichchhavi prince, Chetaka of Vaishali. Vardhamana was married to his cousin Yashoda, and had by her a daughter who was married to his nephew Jamali. At the age of thirty, Mahavira left his home and wandered for 12 years as an ascetic, resting only in the rainy season. In the thirteenth year by the severest penances and constant meditation he reached the ultimate state of knowledge (*kevalya*) under a *sala* tree on the banks of the river Rijupalika near the village Jrimbhikagrama, whose identification is uncertain. He spent the rest of his life in preaching his religious ideas, and organizing the Jaina order of ascetics in Magadha and Anga. But in later centuries Jainism found a congenial soil in Gujarat and Rajasthan, parts of north India, and Karnataka in the south, especially the Mysore region. The teachings of the Jina Mahavira were first collated and recorded in the third century BC; but their final compilation did not take place till the Jaina council met at Valabhi in the early sixth century AD.

Jainism is essentially atheistic, the concept of god being irrelevant. But it accepts a group of *tirthankaras* (prophets) who were deified

men. All mortals possess the potential of becoming as great as them. Jainism conceives of the universe as functioning according to eternal law, continually passing through a series of cosmic waves of progress and decline. According to it, the sole purpose of life is the purification of the soul. The theory of *syadavada* is an essential ingredient of Jaina philosophy. It states that no absolute and final affirmation or denial is possible, because knowledge is relative. In contrast to the Upanishads, Jainism preaches that the purification of the soul cannot be achieved through knowledge but only through a long course of fasting, rigorous practice of non-violence, truth, non-stealing, renunciation, and sexual continence. Although scholars have interpreted Jaina sources to suggest that Jaina monks were not strict vegetarians in early times there is no doubt that the defining trait of Jainism remained non-violence (*ahimsa*). Mahavira's followers, in fact, practised the vow of non-killing (*ahimsa*) to the point of absurdity. Even an unconscious killing of an ant while walking was against Jaina morals. The Jainas would not drink water without straining it for fear of killing an insect. They also wore a muslin mask over the mouth, not for hygiene but to save any life floating in the air. They were forbidden not only the practice of war but also of agriculture, for both involve the killing of living beings. Fasting and self-mortification of all kinds occupied an important place in the Jaina monastic life. Castigation of one's own flesh for long hours in the blazing sun and the pouring rain was an approved practice. Mahavira himself discarded all clothing though Parshva had permitted the use of three garments. Thus in utter contrast to Gosala, who stood for individualistic, licentious self-indulgence, Mahavira preached that rigorous ascetic punishment of the body would free the soul from sorrows. But the common feature of the ideas of both religious teachers was their extremism, which could never win them a mass following.

Of all the religious preachers of the sixth century BC, Gautama Buddha is the best known. His religion had a more popular social base. Gautama, also known as Siddhartha, was born in 586 BC in the kshatriya tribe of the Shakyas headed by his father Suddhodhana; his mother was Mahamaya. As a young prince Gautama received the usual kshatriya training in the art of warfare. Like Mahavira, he was married to a cousin whose name was Yasodhara, and begot a son Rahula. But smitten by the sorrows of life he left his home at the age

of twenty-nine, shaved off his hair, and became an ascetic. He went from place to place seeking guidance, without satisfaction. As a last resort, for the sake of achieving salvation, he gave up asceticism and took to meditation. He made the final discovery at Gaya under a *pipal* tree on the bank of the Niranjana River (the Phalgu). He preached his sermon at Sarnath near Banaras and won back five disciples who had deserted him when he had abandoned the rigid path of asceticism. This sermon was called the Turning of the Wheel of Law (*dharma-chakrapravartana*) and formed the nucleus of all Buddhist teachings. For forty-five years Gautama Buddha wandered on foot to propagate his ideas. But in the west he did not travel beyond Kaushambi; in the east he regularly passed through Rajgir and Gaya and also visited Dakhinagiri near Mirzapur on the southern bank of the Ganga. He died at the age of eighty, at Kushinara. His death is said to have been caused by a meal of pork (*sukaramaddhava*), which he had taken with his lay disciple Chunda at Pava.

The central theme of the Buddha's religion is the eight-step path (*ashtangamarga*). The first step is the proper vision leading to the realization that the world is full of sorrows caused by desire, greed, etc. The second step is right aim, which leaves no room for covetousness or indulgence but encourages everybody to love others fully and increase their happiness. Right speech is the third step; it implies the practice of truthfulness promoting mutual friendship. Proper action, the fourth step, includes abstention from killing, stealing, and fornication, and performance of such deeds as would benefit other people. The fifth step is proper livelihood, earned by pure and honest means. Right effort, the sixth step, means mental exercise to avoid evil thoughts. The seventh step is correct awareness, according to which the human body is made of a nuclear substance. The last step is meditation leading to the removal of evils generated by bonds of flesh and attachment to the mind. Anyone who follows this noble eightfold path would attain final salvation (*nirvana*) irrespective of his social origin.

Certain features are common to Jainism and Buddhism. First, the proponents of both sects had to put in considerable mental and physical effort to seek enlightenment. This is proved by the extremely austere life of Mahavira and Gautama. Second, both religions denied the authority of the Vedas and opposed animal sacrifice, which brought

them into conflict with the Brahmanical orthodoxy. The technological change owing to the introduction of iron led to the increasing development of plough cultivation which was mainly dependent on animal husbandry. Viewed against this background the doctrine of non-injury to animals appears significant. The doctrine of *ahimsa*, popularized for the first time, helped agriculture, which could support at least ten times as many people per square mile as a pastoral economy in the same region. But undue emphasis on non-violence in Jainism stood in the way of its propagation among the agriculturists whose profession necessarily involved killing insects and pests. Nor did Mahavira's ideas become acceptable to those artisans and craftsmen whose occupation endangered the life of other creatures. The strict Jaina restriction on owning private property was interpreted as a ban only on the possession of property in land. The followers of Jainism therefore specialize in the traffic of manufactured goods and confined themselves to financial transactions. This probably explains why Jainism came to be increasingly associated with the spread of urban culture and maritime trade. India's western coast facilitated foreign trade, and therefore it is not without reason that the population in this area is predominantly Jaina even today.

Compared to Jainism, Buddhism was moderate in its stress on *ahimsa*. Although Buddhism clearly enjoins abstention from taking any life, it did not put a blanket ban on eating animal flesh. The Buddha, in fact, is reported to have told the physician Jivaka that the eating of meat was forbidden only when there was evidence of one's eyes and ears as grounds for suspicion that the animal was slain for one's express use. Not surprisingly, he himself ate animal flesh, including beef and pork, on more than one occasion. Nevertheless the Buddha's emphasis on not slaying cattle was deliberate and emphatic. An early Buddhist work states that cattle should be protected because they 'are our friends just as parents and relatives and cultivation depends upon them'. Buddhism recognized that cattle were indispensable to cultivation. In the *Digha Nikaya* the Buddha recalls the legend of the king Mahavijita who was advised by his priest to supply seeds to the peasants, and cattle and suitable implements to those who wanted to serve the state. Since Buddhism, unlike Jainism, showed a greater awareness of the contemporary needs of agriculture, it was acceptable to the village folk.

Both Buddhism and Jainism adopted identical attitudes to trade. The earliest Brahmanical lawbooks prescribed trade and agriculture for the vaishyas, who were ranked third in the social hierarchy. In times of distress the brahmanas could engage in trade, but they could not deal in liquids, perfumes, cloth, butter, or food grains. Apparently the earliest lawgivers looked down upon those who traded in these commodities. The inhabitants of Magadha and Anga were held in low esteem because they traded in certain commodities. Baudhayana even condemns voyaging by sea as a sinful practice. In contrast to this, Buddhist literature mentions sea voyages with approval. The Buddha's attitude towards trade seems to have been favourable; he and the Samgha received generous gifts from Anathapindika and other rich merchants. In view of the Brahmanical attitude it was natural for the newly rising merchant class to turn to Buddhism for sanction. That the first persons to become the Buddha's lay followers, only eight weeks after his obtaining perfect insight, were the two caravaneers passing through Bodh Gaya could not have been accidental.

Trade and the use of money gave rise to money-lending and usury, but the Brahmanical Dharmashastra writers did not favour these new practices. Apastamba, an early lawgiver, lays down that the brahmanas should not accept food from a person who charged interest, or from one living on the labour of a person held as mortgage presumably in return for interest on the loan. He adds that a brahmana approaching the person who lends money on interest should expiate his sin. Budhayana prescribes money-lending for vaishyas but condemns the brahmana who practices usury. The early Buddhist canon defines right livelihood and right action but nowhere condemns usury. In fact, numerous references suggest that an intimate relationship existed between the Buddha and the *setthis* who perhaps lent money on interest. The Buddha even advises the householder to pay off his debts and does not allow a debtor to join the order. In other words, Buddhism, in contrast to Brahmanism, gave its support, indirect though it may have been, to usury, which was symptomatic of the mercantile economy of the Gangetic valley.

We notice a sharp difference between the Brahmanical and the Buddhist attitude to certain features of urban life. The brahmana lawgivers do not seem to have approved of eating houses, which obviously must have been a necessary concomitant of urbanization. Apastamba advised members of the higher castes (mostly brahmanas)

not to eat food prepared in shops. But the Buddhist texts do not exhibit such an attitude. Another significant development in urban social life was the growth of prostitution. The birth of towns and the break-up of the old tribal family due to the sharpening of caste differences may have created a class of alienated women who became prostitutes to eke out a living. The early Buddhist literature refers to prostitutes living in towns. Vaishali became famous because of Ambapali, who charged 50 *karshapana* a night. Prompted by this, Bimbisara, the king of Magadha and a contemporary of the Buddha, appointed a courtesan for the capital city of Rajagriha, who charged double the amount taken by Ambapali. But the Brahmanical injunctions condemn prostitution. Baudhayana and Apastamba forbid brahmanas to accept food from prostitutes (*ganika*) or unchaste women. In contrast to this is the fact that the Buddha once lived as a guest of Ambapali. Initially reluctant to admit women to his church, he had thrice turned down the request of his widowed aunt Mahapajapati Gotami, but he was eventually persuaded by his favourite disciple Ananda to allow women to become its members; the prostitutes were also granted entry to the Samgha. Notwithstanding the Buddha's assertion that nuns could attain spiritual liberation just like monks, the Buddhists never granted an equal status to them in the mendicant order.

Although Buddhism, and to a lesser extent Jainism, took account of the changes in material life and reacted against Vedic orthodoxy, neither sought to abolish the caste system. In the conflict of interests between brahmanas and kshatriyas, to which is often ascribed the kshatriya origin of Mahavira and Gautama, Buddhism accords the first place to kshatriyas and the second to brahmanas. The Buddhist scriptures argue with consummate skill against Brahmanical pretensions and specialized rituals. Buddhism and Jainism adopted a much more liberal attitude towards the lower castes. Not only could members of all the four *varnas* join the Samgha and become monks, but even untouchables like the Chandalas and the Pukkusas could achieve *nirvana*. Matanga, the son of a Chandala, is said to have attained the infinite bliss which many kshatriyas and brahmanas could not achieve. Like the Buddha, Mahavira is also believed to have admitted women to his order; the first female disciple of Mahavira is said to have been a captured slave woman. According to an early Jaina text, women followers of his religion were many, though whether or not they

were capable of attaining salvation remained highly controversial among the various Jaina sects in subsequent centuries.

Neither of the two religions sought to debar members of the lower castes from acquiring knowledge. According to them, anybody who becomes a teacher deserves respect irrespective of his caste. In a Buddhist birth story, a brahmana loses the charm learnt from a Chandala because he denies his father out of shame. Consistent with this is an example mentioned in a later Jaina work of a king who, while learning spells from a Matanga (Chandala), occupied a lower seat. These stories prove that members of the lower castes often joined the Buddhist and the Jaina orders though they may have done so owing to their poverty.

Buddhist and Jaina tolerance towards the lower sections of society is further borne out by the scriptures of the two sects. A Buddhist monk or nun, in contrast to a brahmana, could approach families of all the four *varnas* for food, or could eat at their houses if invited by them. Similarly, an early canonical work permits the Jaina monk to accept food from lower caste families, including weavers. But to what extent the practice of the monks and nuns influenced the lay followers of Buddhism and Jainism is a matter of speculation.

The fact that neither slaves nor debtors were admitted to the Buddhist and Jaina church suggests that neither of the two religions sought to challenge existing social relations. In fact, both seem to have accepted the caste system. In a Buddhist birth story it is claimed that the Buddhas are born only in the two higher castes and never as a vaishya or a shudra. Similarly, an early text states that Jaina teachers are not born in low, mean, degraded, poor, indigent, or brahmana families. According to some Jaina legends, Mahavira was originally conceived in the womb of a brahmana woman but his embryo was later transferred to that of a noble kshatriya, Trishala, who gave birth to him. This reveals the intense Jaina hostility towards brahmanas. The remaining categories of people among whom the Jaina teachers are not to be born evidently belong to the lower social orders.

In spite of the protestant character of Buddhism and Jainism, neither waged any powerful struggle against the caste system and untouchability. On the contrary, Buddhism, like the Brahmanical religion, seems to have recognized the phenomenon of untouchability, which originated in the post-Vedic period and remains to this day an

appalling feature of Indian social life. The Chandalas and the Nishadas, originally aboriginals, were untouchables to the Buddhists. At one place the Buddha himself equates the food earned by unlawful means with the leavings of a Chandala. This is in tune with the attitude of the early Brahmanical lawgivers, who prescribed bathing as essential for those members of the higher castes who touched a Chandala. The new religions, therefore, did not try to abolish the existing social differentiations; they strongly refuted, however, the importance of caste for the attainment of *nirvana*.

Buddhism and Jainism tried to improve the position of slaves in some ways. Whereas Apastamba forbids trade in human beings only for the brahmanas, the new religions prohibit it even for their lay followers. The *Digha Nikaya* advises masters to treat their slaves decently. A Jaina text also states that *dasas* and *dasis*, *karmakaras* and *karmakaris* deserve to be well maintained by their employers. Passages such as these may have generated at least in the Buddhist and the Jaina monks and nuns a feeling of generosity and kindness, which may have added to their following among the lower orders.

CHAPTER 5

Early State Formation

Like religion, contemporary political developments were also deeply rooted in changing material conditions. As has been shown earlier, the tribal political organization of the Rigvedic phase was already giving way to the territorial state towards the end of the Vedic period. But the territorial idea was gradually strengthened in the sixth century BC with the rise of large states with towns as their seats of power. A passage from Panini makes it clear that the people owed allegiance to the *janapada* (territory) to which they belonged. Thus, an important feature of political life was the emergence of several territorial states in different parts of the country.

According to the traditional literature, sixteen large states (*maha-janapadas*), each comprising several agricultural settlements (*janapadas*), existed in India in the sixth century BC. They are Gandhara, Kamboja, Assaka, Vatsa, Avanti, Shurasena, Chedi, Malla, Kuru, Panchala, Matsya, Vajji (Vrijji), Anga, Kashi, Koshala, and Magadha. Kashi was at first the most powerful of them and perhaps played an important part in the subversion of the Videhan monarchy; its capital Varanasi is described in various sources as an important city. According to the *Dasaratha Jataka*, one of the Buddhist birth stories, Rama, whom it describes both as the brother and husband of Sita, was the king of Kashi and not Ayodhya where his modern devotees (*Ramabhaktas*) demolished a medieval mosque in 1992 leading to a communal holocaust in the country. The economic importance of Kashi lay in the fact that it had emerged as a leading centre of textile manufacture in the time of the Buddha; the *kashaya* (orange brown) robes of the Buddhist monks are said to have been manufactured here.

Koshala was bounded on the west by the river Gomati, on the south by the Sarpika or Syandika (Sai), on the east by the Sadanira (Gandak) which separated it from Videha, and on the north by the Nepal hills. Ayodhya on the Saryu, associated with the Rama story in

the *Ramayana*, Saketa adjoining it, and Shravasti (Sahet-Mahet) on the borders of the Gonda and Bahraich districts of Uttar Pradesh, were three important Koshalan cities, though excavations indicate that none of them was settled on any considerable scale before the sixth century BC.

Anga on the east of Magadha was separated from it by the river Champa and comprised the modern districts of Munger and Bhagalpur. Its capital Champa, on the bank of the river of the same name, was noted for its wealth and commerce.

Between Anga and Vatsa there lay the kingdom of Magadha corresponding to the present-day Patna and Gaya districts, bounded on the north and west by the rivers Ganga and Sone, on the south by the Vindhya outcrop, and on the east by the river Champa. Brahmanical texts make derogatory references to Magadha and its people because the Magadhans did not follow the *varna* system and did not practise the rituals prescribed by them. This was in sharp contrast to the attitude of the Buddhists who attach great importance to this area. The Magadhan rulers Bimbisara and Ajatashatru were the Buddha's friends and disciples. Gaya was the place of the Buddha's enlightenment and Rajagriha was one of his favourite haunts. Rendered impregnable by a perimeter of five hills, Rajagriha, also known as Girivraja, was the Magadhan capital.

The Vajji territory lay north of the Ganga and stretched as far as the Nepal hills. Its western limit was the river Sadanira (Gandak), which separated it from Malla and Koshala. In the east it extended up to the forests on the banks of the rivers Koshi and Mahananda. The Vajji state is said to have been a confederation of eight clans (*atthakula*), of whom the Videhans, the Lichchhavis, the Jnatrikas, and the Vrijjis proper were the most important. In all likelihood the Vajji confederation took form after the decline and fall of the Videhan monarchy and was a flourishing non-monarchical state in the time of Mahavira and Gautama Buddha.

The territory of the non-monarchical Mallas, supposed to have been ruled by five hundred chiefs, was divided into two parts, each having its own capital. The two capital cities were Kushinara (identified with Kasia in Gorakhpur district), and Pava, possibly identical with Pawapuri 90 km from Patna. The Mallas, like the Videhans, had at first a monarchical constitution, which was replaced by what has

THE MAHAJANAPADAS

INDEX

MAHAJANAPADA *ANGA*

ANCIENT CITY ●

MODERN TOWN ○

NATIONAL BOUNDARY

KAMBOJA
Charsada
Taxila
GANDHARA
Srinagar
Indus R.
KURU
PANCHALA
Indraprastha
Hastinapur
Lumbini
KOSALA
SHURASENA
Shravasti
Sohagaura
Virat
Mathura
MALLAS
Bangarh
Brahmaputra R.
MATSYA
VATSA
VAJJI
Vaisali
Mahasthan
KASHI
Ganga R.
ANGA
Kaushambi
MAGADHA
Varanasi
Rajgir
Champa
AVANTI
CHEDI
Eran
Bharukaccha
Ujjain
Vidisa
Tamluk
Culcutta
Chandraketugarh
Sisupalgarh
Bombay
ASMAKA
BAY OF BENGAL
ARABIAN SEA
Godavari R.
Krishna R.
ANDAMAN and NICOBAR ISLANDS (India)
LAKSHADWEEP (India)
Madras
Cauvery R.
SCALE
500 km.
300 miles
Anuradhapur
INDIAN OCEA
N
W
E
S

generally been described as a republican polity. Literary writings refer to some kind of alliance between the Mallas, the Lichchhavis, and the clan lords of Kashi-Koshala. The league may have been directed against the rising power of Magadha.

The kingdom of the Chedis corresponded roughly to the eastern parts of Bundelkhand and adjoining areas, and their king lists occur in the Buddhist birth stories. Shishupala was a Chedi ruler and the famous enemy of Krishna. Both figure in the *Mahabharata*, the latter being the most prominent among its *dramatis personae* who manoeuvred the Pandavas and their cousins into a war. The slaying of Shishupala became the central theme of a long poem by a later poet, Magha.

The Shurasena kingdom, with its capital at Mathura, was inhospitable because of 'uneven roads, excessive dust, vicious talks and *yakshas* (demons)'. The *Mahabharata* and the Puranas refer to the ruling family of Mathura as belonging to the Yadava clan with which is also associated the epic hero Krishna who later emerged as India's most interesting god from the numerous layers of contradictory myths that grew around him in course of time.

Kuru, Panchala, and Matsya were the three tribal polities whose existence is traceable to the preceding period. The Kurus settled in the region of Delhi-Meerut, and allied with the Panchalas; their trade centre is said to have been visited by the Buddha. A branch of the Panchalas had a capital at Kampilla, perhaps modern Kampil in Farrukhabad district. Not much information is available about the Matsyas, who are traditionally associated with the Jaipur-Bharatpur-Alwar region of Rajasthan; this area was more suitable for cattle raising.

Kamboja and Gandhara were farthest away from Magadha. The first lay in Afghanistan; the second extended up to the Kabul valley with Taxila as its leading city. According to the Buddhist tradition, the Gandhara king Pukkusati exchanged gifts with Bimbisara in Magadha and went on foot to see the Buddha. A little before 530 BC, Cyrus, the Achaemenid emperor of Persia, crossed the Hindukush and received tributes from the people of Kamboja, Gandhara, and the trans-Indus area. According to the Greek historian Herodotus, Gandhara formed the twentieth province of the Achaemenid empire and was the most populous and wealthy; it supplied men and material to the Persian army fighting against the Greeks.

The territory of the Assakas (Ashmakas) was situated on the bank of the river Godavari near Paithan in Maharashtra. It became commercially important in course of time. The state of Avanti lay in central Malwa and the adjoining areas of Madhya Pradesh. Divided into two parts, its southern capital was Mahishmati and its northern Ujjain, which became more important of the two. The Avanti king Pradyota is famous in legends, according to which from an enemy he became father-in-law of Udayan, who ruled over the Vatsa kingdom. Its capital lay 64 km from Allahabad at Kaushambi (Kosam) on the bank of the Yamuna. Kaushambi and Ujjain were connected by a major trade route, and they must have benefited from north Indian trade.

All the sixteen *mahajanapadas* did not play the same role in contemporary politics. Kashi, which was most important at first, lost its position to Koshala and Magadha. These two kingdoms vied with each other for control of the Ganga basin, which, owing to the riverine commercial traffic, had certain clear strategic and economic advantages. In the sixth century BC only four states—Kashi, Koshala, Magadha, and the Vajjian confederacy—remained important. They fought for political hegemony for nearly a hundred years. Eventually Magadha emerged victorious and became the centre of political activity in north India.

The first important ruler of Magadha was Bimbisara who ascended the throne in the second half of the sixth century BC. Although Bimbisara was a patron of Buddhism, his lineage is not discussed in Buddhist sources. He is described as Seniya, 'with an army', being perhaps the first king to have a regular standing army.

Pasenadi (Prasenajit), the king of Koshala, claimed descent from Ikshvaku who is known in Vedic sources; but his claim was not recognized by other princes. The story goes that he asked for a Shakyan girl in marriage. Although the Shakyans were under his suzerainty, they were embarrassed because of their claim of having descended from Ikshvaku. Finally, however, the Shakyans cheated the Koshalan king by sending the beautiful Vasabhakhattiya, daughter of Mahanama Shakya by a slave woman, Nagamunda, which name might suggest an aboriginal origin from the Naga tribe. But the son of this union, Vidudabha, remained heir-apparent to the Koshalan kingdom.

The kings of Magadha and Koshala started as relatively unaggressive

rulers; both patronized the new religious preachers and entered into a matrimonial alliance between themselves. Prasenajit's sister was the wife of Bimbisara, who received a Kashi village as dowry; some accounts refer to the former's daughter as the wife of the latter's son. Bimbisara arranged marriages with several other royal houses of the time. He married Chellana, the daughter of the Lichchhavi chief Chetaka. Khema, another wife of the king, was a daughter of the king of Madra. Dynastic marriages promoted goodwill between Bimbisara and contemporary rulers, and thus strengthened his position. Bimbisara also tried to win the friendship of Pradyota, the king of Avanti, for whose medical assistance he sent his personal physician Jivaka to Ujjain. The only *·mahajanapada* which was a victim of Bimbisara's aggression was Anga; it was annexed to Magadha. The friendly relations that subsisted between Magadha and Koshala left their rulers free to fight the tribes which lived in the forest region of the two kingdoms.

The beginning of the conflict between Koshala and Magadha took place in the time of Ajatashatru, who out of ambition to become king, imprisoned his father Bimbisara in a dungeon and then killed him; his Koshalan wife, who could not bear the shock of her husband's murder, soon joined him in death. Reacting to this, Prasenajit revoked the gift of the Kashi village, which had formed part of his sister's dowry and whose importance lay not in its revenue but in its trade potential. Therefore, war took place between Ajatashatru and Prasenajit. Several battles were fought without lasting success for either. Ultimately Prasenajit was betrayed by his own minister Dirghacharayana, who handed the royal insignia to Prasenajit's son and the military command to Vidudabha, while the king was busy paying what would prove to be his final visit to the Buddha. The fugitive ruler, accompanied by a servant woman, reached Rajagriha one night after the gates had been shut and died of exhaustion. Ajatashatru gave him a state funeral and, being his nephew, claimed his kingdom in the bargain as it were! An untimely flood in the river Rapti drowned Vidudabha along with his army, and the Koshala kingdom was annexed to Magadha without a battle.

Ajatashatru opposed the tribal confederacy of the Vajjis, headed by the Lichchhavis of Vaishali. This was part of the general monarchical antagonism against the tribal polities. Vidudabha had already waged a

direct war on the Shakyans and bathed his throne in Shakyan blood. It was left to Ajatashatru to destroy the power of the Lichchhavis. The Mallas, Lichchhavis, and similar tribes were great impediments in the growth of monarchy, whose real strength lay in well-organized standing armies which had no tribal character. The immediate pretext of the war was that the traders complained of double imposts collected by the Lichchhavis and by the Magadhan king, both claiming full control of the river Ganga. The first step was the setting up of a fortified stockade at Pataliputra (Patna) at the confluence of three rivers, the Ganga, Sone and Gandak, which in the time of Ajatashatru became the capital of Magadha. A brahmana minister Vassakara, sent by Ajatashatru to sow internal discord among the Lichchhavis, succeeded in setting one tribal chief against the other by encouraging each chief to claim more than his due. The oligarchs were made to neglect tribal meetings, collective military drill, and the tribal judicial assembly, which completely undermined tribal solidarity. When the situation was ripe Vassakara sent word to Ajatashatru, who marched into Vaishali to gain an easy victory. Details of the defeat and destruction of the Mallas are not known; but they were soon ruined. However, the fall of the Lichchhavis must not be attributed only to internal dissensions engineered by an individual minister. The tribe decayed under the influence of wealth collected through taxes and tribute, and retained as private property by the oligarchs. Tribal life was disrupted before Ajatashatru's agent was sent on comission. The rise of such an outstanding religious teacher as Mahavira among the Lichchhavis, and the seeking of employment by the two Mallas, Bandhula and Karayan, with the king of Koshala suggest that tribal life had already ceased to give satisfaction to the ablest members of the tribe. This is also indicated by the story of the famous physician Jivaka. Found as an abandoned child in a street of Rajagriha, he later went as far as Taxila to study medicine and on his return became the private physician of Bimbisara, who used to send him to look after the Buddha; he became affluent enough to give gifts to Buddhist monks.

Through his conquests Ajatashatru extended the frontiers of the Magadhan kingdom and laid the foundations of what later became an empire. But much was left for his successors to do. The *Majjihima Nikaya* makes a passing reference to the Avanti king Pradyota's intention to invade Magadha, which prompted Ajatashatru to refortify Rajagriha. But Avanti, with its capital at Ujjain, was annexed to the Magadhan

kingdom after the reign of Ajatashatru. The Vatsa king Udayana is known for his quarrel with Pradyota of Ujjain and for the cycle of romance relating to him and his queen Vasavadatta, later immortalized by Bhasa, one of ancient India's foremost dramatists. But nothing is known about the amalgamation of Vatsa with Magadha. The Purus, Shurasenas and Matsyas, the tribal states of Vedic origin, did not last beyond the fourth century BC.

Ajatashatru died in 461 BC One who had killed his father to seize the throne, he was succeeded by five kings all of whom, according to the Sri Laukan Buddhist chronicle *Mahavamsa*, ascended the throne after killing their fathers. The accession of five parricides in quick succession roused the indignation of the people, who perhaps deposed the last in 413 BC, and made Shishunaga, a viceroy of Banaras, the king. The Shishunaga dynasty ruled for half a century and finally gave way to the usurper Mahapadma Nanda, whose dynasty ruled until 321 BC.

According to some sources, Mahapadma, the founder of the dynasty, was the son of a shudra mother. Other sources suggest that he was born of the union of a barber with a courtesan. In any case, it remains true that the Nandas were the first of a number of non-kshatriya ruling dynasties. Mahapadma himself is described later in the Puranas as the destroyer of all the kshatriyas. He is also credited with the final overthrow of the contemporary royal houses. The Nandas, therefore, are sometimes described as the first empire builders of India. They inherited the large kingdom of Magadha and extended it to yet more distant frontiers through their fabulous wealth and a vast army consisting of 20,000 cavalry, 200,000 infantry, 2,000 chariots, and 3,000 elephants. That the Nandas controlled some parts of Kalinga (Orissa) is borne out by the Hathigumpha inscription of King Kharavela, assigned to the middle of the first century BC. Parts of the Deccan may also have formed part of the Magadhan empire. Several Mysore inscriptions of the twelfth century indicate that the southern portion of the Kuntala region in Maharashtra was under the Nanda control, but these late records may not be reliable. Although the actual boundary of the empire of the Nandas is difficult to determine, of all the *mahajanapadas* which flourished in the sixth century BC Magadha emerged as the most powerful.

The first phase of the expansion and consolidation of the Magadhan empire was over by the reign of Mahapadma Nanda. At about the

same time Alexander of Macedon defeated Darius III, the last Achaemenid emperor, and proceeded to conquer the whole of his empire. After a long campaign in Bactria, situated on the borders of the erstwhile USSR and Afghanistan, Alexander crossed the Hindu-kush and in 327 BC entered north-western India which had been an Achaemenid province. Ambhi (Omphis), the king of Taxila (Takshashila), submitted to Alexander in 327 BC. Porus, who ruled over the territory between the Jhelum and the Ravi, resisted his advance, but was defeated and captured. Later Alexander, impressed by Porus, reinstated him to power, and at the time of his return from India left him in charge of the Panjab. Alexander then conquered the tribal republican territory of the Glauganikai (Glachukayanaka) with its thirty-seven towns.

Plate 4: The Indian King Porus on his war-elephant, attacked by Alexander on horseback: a coin struck by Alexander to celebrate his victory in 326 BC.

As is clear from the Greek accounts, such tribes as the Aspasioi (Asvayana), Assakenoi (Ashmarkas), Kathaioi (Kathas), Malloi (Malava), Oxydrakai (Kshudrakas), Sibai (Sivis), and Agalassoi (Arjunayanas?) put up a strong resistance against Alexander; the Adraistai (Adrishtas or Arattas; Arashtraka = kingless), Ambasthas and Kathaioi (kshatriya) chose not to fight. In the battle against the Aspasioi Alexander was seriously wounded, but he still managed to crush them. As many as 40,000 were taken prisoner from among them. Alexander also took away their 200,000 oxen. Similarly, the entire body of 7,000 troops belonging to the Assakenoi was done to death. The Kathaioi could not win; their casualties amounted to 17,000 killed and 70,000 captured. The most determined opposition to Alexander was organized by a confederacy of tribes led by the Malloi (Malavas) and the Oxydrakai (Kshudrakas). Alexander, while scaling the wall of a Malava stronghold, was seriously injured by a long arrow. The infuriated Macedonian soldiers massacred all the inhabitants; the Kshudrakas, disheartened by the Malava defeat, submitted. The Greek campaign in north-western India lasted two years, after which Alexander's soldiers laid down their arms and refused to go further east. An encounter between the Macedonian mercenaries and the large army of the Nandas of Magadha was thus avoided.

Alexander established in India a number of Greek settlements, some of which may have survived until the time of Ashoka and even later. The important ones among them were the city of Alexandria in the Kabul region, Boukephala, possibly on the eastern bank of the Jhelum, and Alexandria in Sindh. The march of the army from mainland Greece to India opened up land routes, which promoted trade in subsequent centuries. But the immediate effect of Alexander's whirlwind expedition was the destruction of several tribes. Smaller kingdoms merged into the bigger ones. The process of political unification was unleashed. A few years later Chandragupta Maurya took advantage of the void created by Alexander's departure and amalgamated all the tribal states of north-western India under Magadhan suzerainty.

Why of all the *janapadas* Magadha alone rose to prominence and became the seat of a powerful monarchy and the nucleus of an extensive empire is an interesting question. It would be superficial and puerile to ascribe the rise and expansion of Magadha solely to the abilities and ambitions of such individual rulers as Bimbisara,

Ajatashatru, and Mahapadma Nanda. Even though incompetent rulers succeeded both Ajatashatru and Mahapadma, Magadha continued to grow in strength and increase in extent. There were certain deeper causes behind the success of Magadha. Its favourable geographical position enabled it to control the whole lower Gangetic plain, and its rich alluvial soil provided a strong agricultural base. The thick forests beyond Gaya in south Bihar supplied both timber for buildings and elephants for the army. What is probably most important is that Magadha controlled the supply of the richest deposits of copper and iron ores available to the south-east in the hills beyond Gaya. This rendered possible the manufacture of better weapons and implements which were systematically used to clear the land and bring it under the plough. Magadha could thus also improve its military technology, as can be inferred from the use of superior weapons of war against Vaishali.

Rajagriha, which remained the capital of Magadha up to the time of Ajatashatru, was surrounded by an easily defended perimeter of hills fortified with cyclopean walls 40 km in length. The city had an excellent supply of water from both hot and cold streams and could resist enemy attack indefinitely. Initially, Magadha was not suitably placed on the trade route. But the shift of the capital to Pataliputra gave it control over the river traffic. All these factors account for the expansion and stability of Magadha, which gradually swallowed the other contemporary states.

The rapid development and consolidation of the pre-Maurya states owed a great deal to the land taxes, which became a substantial and permanent source of income for the exchequer. *Bali*, originally a voluntary tribute, became obligatory. New taxes such as *bhaga* and *kara*, both unheard of in the earlier period, seem to have become a source of state income. The fertility of soil in the Gangetic valley and the rise of a new class of rich peasant proprietors who were in a position to pay taxes contributed to the growth of revenues. Peasants were taxed even in earlier times, but now we find new tax-paying classes of artisans and traders. According to the lawbooks, the artisans had to work one day a month for the king, and the traders had to pay taxes on sales to a toll officer known as the *shaulkika* or *shulkadhyaksha*.

The state treasury was further replenished by some oppressive

taxation measures. At least two types of officers, *tundiyas* and *akasiyas*, are described in the Jataka stories as collecting taxes from the people, either by beating and binding them or by dispossessing them of their earnings. Although the details of the tax-collecting machinery are not known, we have references to the Nanda kings enriching themselves by raising taxes from the people. A Sri Lankan chronicle of the fifth century AD refers to one Ugrasena of Magadha who accumulated wealth to the tune of 80 *kotis* through indiscreet fund-raising measures. The Buddhist birth stories mention no less than half a dozen revenue officers, as against only one tax collector known as the *bhagadugha* (milcher of the cow) in the later Vedic period.

Connected with the growth of the taxation system was the development of the state machinery. The post-Vedic period witnessed the earliest appearance of the royal advisers or ministers. Vassakara of Magadha and Dirghacharayana of Koshala are known to have been effective ministers with great political influence. In the countryside local administration was entrusted to the village headman, whose office grew out of the leadership of the tribal militia, for the *gramani* means the head of the *grama* or tribe. In the age of the Buddha, when tribal life was at a discount, the *gramani* became the administrative head of the village and came to be known by several names such as *gramyadhyaksha, gramani*, and *gramika*. Reference to 80,000 *gramikas* in the time of Bimbisara is found in Buddhist literature, though the figure obviously is an inflated one. At any rate, it is clear that the administrative machinery was becoming complex and the power of the state was increasing.

The real and most effective prop of the state organization was the standing army, whose origins may be traced back to the earlier period and whose growth was promoted by socio-economic developments in the age of the Buddha. With the decline of tribal life and the corresponding division of society into caste-classes, the tribal militia was naturally replaced by the standing army, whose importance was duly recognized in this period. The *senanayaka* occupied an exalted place in the list of high functionaries. The Nanda ruler of Magadha is reported to have kept 20,000 cavalry, 200,000 infantry, 2,000 four-horsed chariots, and 3,000 to 6,000 elephants at the time of Alexander's invasion. Although the large army of the Nandas may have been financed by the enormous wealth for which they are traditionally

famous, this cannot legitimately be said of all the other states (*mahajanapadas*) of the time. The development of the standing army was facilitated in most of the *mahajanapadas* only by a fiscal system which came to be somewhat firmly established in post-Vedic times.

A legal and judicial system, an important weapon of coercion in the hands of any ruling class, originated in this period. In a society divided into castes, the old egalitarian tribal law was found obsolete. Therefore, the Brahmanical thinkers defined the duty of each caste, and imposed social, economic, and political disabilities on the shudras; they also laid down injunctions undermining the position of women. All this is amply reflected in the civil and criminal laws formulated by the early Brahmanical lawbooks. The gradual substitution of the new laws based on the *varna* system for the tribal law also partially explains the absence of the *sabha* and the *samiti*, the Vedic popular assemblies, which were tribal in character.

The *sabha* and *samiti* had begun to lose their importance towards the end of the Vedic period; now they seem to have been replaced by caste associations, which, however, restricted their activities to the social sphere. The tribal assemblies could not fit into the organizational framework of the large territorial states of the sixth century BC; nor could they be resilient enough to accommodate the non-Aryan aboriginals who lived in the new kingdoms. Thus, whereas the *samiti* of the Panchalas is mentioned in later Vedic texts, no reference to the popular assemblies of their successors is available. On the other hand, the Brahmanical lawbooks of the period provide for a new body, the *parishad*, consisting exclusively of brahmanas.

These developments were mostly confined to the monarchical states, which were concentrated in the fertile Gangetic plain. These states were different from the so-called republics (*gana*), which flourished in the modern Panjab, where they may have been survivals of the early Vedic tribes, and in the periphery of the Gangetic kingdoms or the less fertile Himalayan foothills. The origin of the territorial republics in the sub-Himalayan region has been traced to the reaction against the pattern of life that evolved in the later Vedic period. The movement against Vedic institutions was aimed at the abolition of the growing class and sex distinctions and was directed against the acceptance of religious practices which took a heavy toll of cattle stock. It was also directed against the hereditary kingship bolstered by

the brahmanas, who arrogated to themselves all the rights and privileges to the exclusion of all the other sections of society.

The new movement against Vedic orthodoxy derived inspiration from traditions about the remote past when there were no *varna* distinctions, no domination by the upper classes of the lower ones, and no coercive oppression of the people by hereditary kings. This perhaps explains the legends according to which republics replaced monarchies. The traditional story of the origin of the Shakyas, to which tribe the Buddha belonged, tells us that they had descended from the royal house of Koshala. We are told that four brothers and their four sisters were expelled by their royal father; so they went to the Himalayan foothills and resolved to preserve the purity of their race by marrying among themselves. The account clearly indicates that the founders of the republics broke away from the parent stock and moved to new areas. This may have been the case with Videha and Vaishali, which are referred to as monarchies transformed into republics.

The tendency to break away from the monarchies can be attributed to the socio-political conditions of the period. In the early period members of the ruling elites obtained a portion of the booty of war and the tributes collected from the vanquished. But in subsequent times, when the victorious tribal chiefs came to occupy prominent and hereditary royal positions in the territorial states, they claimed all revenues for themselves. The leading members of the tribe resented the situation, and demanded the right to collect taxes from the peasants and the right to bear arms and maintain their own army. The reaction gave birth to a political framework that has been glorified by modern historians as being republican and democratic.

The central feature of the 'republican' government was its seemingly corporate character. The representatives of the tribes and the heads of families may have sat in the public assembly (*santhagara*) of the capital. The tribal assembly was presided over by one of the representatives called the *raja* or *senapati*. In a later Buddhist story, Simha, in spite of being the youngest son of *senapati* Khanda, was allowed to succeed his father to office. When Simha wanted to step aside in favour of his eldest brother, the members of the assembly plainly told him that the office did not belong to his family but to the assembly of the tribe. This indicates that the office of the chief executive of the tribal state was not hereditary, and that he was more a chief than a king. All

important issues were placed before the assembly, and no decision was taken in the absence of unanimity among members. This has given rise to the much trumpeted notion propagated by some historians that the non-monarchical states of the post-Vedic period were truly democratic in character.

In point of fact, oligarchs dominated the assemblies. The absence of monarchy did not really mean the prevalence of democracy in the true sense of the term. Members of the assembly belonged mostly to the kshatriya caste, and at least in the case of the Lichchhavis it is known that most non-kshatriyas, slaves, and wage labourers had no place there. This proves that the republican system was in essence oligarchical. The elder members of the aristocratic families (*rajakulas*) formed the core of the assembly; in one case the *rajakulas* are credited with the right of declaring war. Members of the republican assembly bore the title *raja* or king. The head of the state was a *senapati*, the term denoting commander of the army in the monarchical system. Even the officers of the republics bore the same titles as their counterparts in the contemporary monarchies. Such common terms as *mahamatta* (*mahamatya*) and *amachchha* (*amatya*) were used to describe officers both in the republics as well as in the kingdoms. This shows that the post-Vedic republics were greatly influenced by the monarchies of the time.

The strict control which non-monarchical governments exercised over their domains through executive edicts and legislation expose their undemocratic character. A Buddhist narrative tells us that on the occasion of the Buddha's visit to the city of Pava, the Mallas issued a decree that a general welcome should be given to him, and enforced it by the penalty of a heavy fine for defaulting. This anticipates the authoritarianism and centralized monarchical governance associated with the Maurya kings who ruled over large parts of the country in the subsequent period. If credence is given to a Jataka story, there was a ban among the Shakyas on the marriage of a girl even with a king of supposedly low status; nor was it permitted for people of unequal birth to dine together. Similarly, the *gana* of Vaishali is said to have formulated a rule which related to the marriage of girls in different wards of the city. The laws enacted by the 'republican' states to control the private and family life of individual members of society are no better than those evolved by the brahmana authors of the

Dharmasutras. The 'republics' could not do away with the essential organizational and ideological features of the monarchies. The governments of the Lichchhavis, Shakyas and Mallas possessed all the paraphernalia of a monarchical state apparatus. Yet they could not rise above the level of 'distorted republics', and eventually succumbed to the might of Magadha, which established its political hegemony after a long and bitter struggle with the contemporary states.

CHAPTER 6

The First Empire

After the overthrow of the Nanda dynasty at Magadha, the Mauryas rose to prominence. The history of their rule is rendered comparatively reliable on account of evidence obtained from a variety of sources. The Buddhist and Jaina traditions, the early Dharmashastra texts, and the material retrieved from archaeological excavations continue to remain important bases of historical reconstruction. In addition, several new sources of information are available for the reconstruction of the history of the Mauryas. The *Arthashastra* of Kautilya, for example, has considerable bearing on the developments during their rule. Its date has been a matter of debate; a computer analysis of the text discerns no less than three different styles in it and this suggests that its composition may have stretched over several centuries. Nevertheless, there is a general consensus among scholars that certain portions of the work (Books II, III, and IV) have a genuine Maurya touch about them and may be taken as its original kernel. The Greek account called *Indika* written by Megasthenes is another authentic source for the Maurya period. Though available only in fragments, it shows correspondence with the Kautilyan text at many places. The most authentic Maurya records, however, remain the first decipherable inscriptions issued by Ashoka. They have been found at 45 places on the highways in the Indian subcontinent and Afghanistan, in 181 versions, and were composed in the Prakrit language and written in the Brahmi script in the greater part of the Maurya empire, though in its north-western region they appear in the Aramaic and Kharoshthi scripts. In Afghanistan, however, they are written in both the Aramaic and Greek scripts and languages. The Puranas, belonging as they do to a much later period, have much less claim to authenticity in the absence of corroborative historical material.

Chandragupta, the founder of the Maurya dynasty, succeeded to

the Nanda throne in about 321 BC at the age of twenty-five. Indian tradition has it that the brahmana Kautilya, also known as Chanakya or Vishnugupta, was his mentor and guide. The origin and early life of Chandragupta remain obscure, though according to the prevalent view he belonged to the Moriya tribe and his caste was low. The older story of his base birth is no longer acceptable to most historians. Both Indian and classical Greek sources state that he overthrew the last Nanda ruler and occupied his capital Pataliputra (Patna). The Greek accounts add that he moved to north-west India and subdued the Greek garrisons left behind by Alexander.

Soon, however, Seleukos Nikator gained control of most of the Asiatic provinces of the Macedonian empire, and in 305 BC he seems to have met Chandragupta in battle. They signed a treaty and entered into a marriage alliance. Who married whose daughter is not quite clear but it seems that Chandragupta probably made a gift of 500 elephants to the Greek general and obtained territory across the Indus. Seleukos's ambassador, Megasthenes, lived for many years at the Maurya court at Pataliputra and travelled extensively in the country. According to Jaina sources, Chandragupta embraced Jainism towards the end of his life and stepped down from the throne in favour of his son. Accompanied by Bhadrabahu, a Jaina saint, and several other monks, he is said to have gone to Sravana Belgola near Mysore, where he deliberately starved himself to death in the approved Jaina fashion.

In 297 BC Chandragupta was succeeded by his son Bindusara, known to the Greeks as Amitrochates (Sanskrit, *Amitraghata* = the destroyer of foes). He is said to have had contacts with Antiochus I, the Seleucid king of Syria. A man of wide tastes and interests, he requested Antiochus to send him some sweet wine, dried figs, and a Sophist; the last being not meant for export, however, could not be sent. According to the Tibetan Buddhist monk Taranatha, who visited India in the sixteenth century, Bindusara conquered 'the land between the two seas'. This has been taken to mean that he annexed to the Magadhan kingdom the peninsular region of India. Early Tamil literature, it has been pointed out, also mentions the Maurya invasion of the far south. But this does not adequately justify the assumption that Bindusara annexed the southernmost part of India to the Maurya empire. Nevertheless, it is possible that his kingdom extended in the

south up to the Mysore region. Kalinga (modern Orissa), on the eastern coast, however, remained hostile and was conquered in the succeeding reign by Bindusara's son Ashoka.

Nearly a century and half ago Ashoka was merely a shadowy Maurya king mentioned in the Puranas. In 1837 James Prinsep deciphered an inscription in the Brahmi script referring to a king called Devanama Piyadassi (beloved of the gods). Later many more similar inscriptions were discovered. Initially these records could not be attributed to Ashoka. But in 1915 was discovered another inscription which speaks of Ashoka Piyadassi. This, corroborated by the Sri Lankan chronicle, *Mahavamsa,* established that Ashoka, the Maurya monarch, was the Devanamapiya Piyadassi of the inscriptions.

According to Buddhist sources, Ashoka usurped the throne after killing all rival claimants and began his reign as a tyrant, though this remains unsubstantiated by his inscriptions. The most important event of Ashoka's reign seems to have been his conversion to Buddhism after his victory over Kalinga in 260 BC. The horror of the war as described in the emperor's own words is possibly an over-statement: 'a hundred and fifty thousand people were deported, a hundred thousand were killed and many more died . . .'. Some scholars would have us believe that Ashoka, moved by the untold miseries caused by the war, dramatically embraced Buddhism. But according to one of his inscriptions, it was only after a period of two and a half years that he became an enthusiastic supporter of the religion of the Buddha. Under its influence he eventually foreswore conquest by war and replaced it with conquest by piety (*dhammaghosha*). The Buddhist church was reorganized during his reign, with the meeting of the third Buddhist council at Pataliputra in 250 BC under the chairmanship of Mogalliputta Tissa. This was followed by the dispatch of missionaries to south India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and other countries to propagate Buddhism. Ashoka's own records do not suggest his association with the Buddhist council convened during his reign. His edicts, however, prove his relationship with the Buddhist church as well as his own firm belief in Buddhism. But there is little basis for the view that Ashoka ever donned the robes of a Buddhist monk.

The first three Mauryas were responsible for the unification of a large part of the country under their political hegemony. Chandragupta had already brought nearly all of north India under Magadhan control;

THE EMPIRE OF ASOKA

(C. 274-236)

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INDIAN OCEAN
SCALE 500 km.
300 miles
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the evidence from epigraphy and Sri Lankan chronicles indicates that Bengal had also become part of the Magadhan empire in the early Maurya period. Indirect evidence cited earlier may imply that a major portion of the south Indian peninsula came under Maurya influence during the time of Bindusara; Kalinga was subjugated by Ashoka. Reference to such southern peoples as the Cholas, Pandyas, Satyaputras and Keralaputras is found in the epigraphs of Ashoka, but his relationship with them was probably friendly. Judging from the provenance of the Ashokan edicts, Maurya influence did not extend beyond Mysore in the south and Kandahar in the west. According to tradition, Kashmir was a part of the Maurya empire and Ashoka built the city of Shrinagara. The Maurya state thus seems to have exercised its influence over a vast territory. It is likely that under its impact the process of state formation in remote areas of the country, especially the Deccan and the far south, was accelerated.

The Mauryas maintained friendly relations with several contemporary powers. Bindusara's request to Antiochus has already been referred to. Ashoka is said to have given his daughter in marriage to a Nepalese nobleman and appears to have had very close connections with Nepal. The Tibetan sources also refer to his visit to Khotan in Central Asia, but the evidence is suspect. It is likely, however, that Ashoka sent his missions to the region, though evidence for Sino-Indian contact in the Mauryan period is wanting. In one of his edicts Ashoka mentions Antiochus Theos of Syria (260-246 BC), the grandson of Seleukos Nikator, Ptolemy III Philadelphus of Egypt (285-247 BC), Antigonus Gonatus of Macedonia (279-239 BC), Magas of Cyrene, and Alexander of Epirus—all kings of the contemporary Hellenic world—with whom he exchanged missions. The Sri Lankan tradition furnishes ample indication of the extremely cordial relationship existing between the Mauryas and Sri Lanka. Ashoka is said to have sent his son Mahendra to Sri Lanka as a Buddhist missionary, though the visit of his daughter there to preach Buddhism is questionable. Tissa, the contemporary king of the island, apparently derived much inspiration from Ashoka. Friendly political relationship with foreign rulers promoted commerce and communication with the outside world as well as the exchange of ideas.

The Mauryas achieved political supremacy over the whole of India (except the extreme south) with the help of a huge army. No

other ruling house in ancient India maintained a larger army. According to Plutarch and Justin, Chandragupta Maurya overran the whole of India with 600,000 men, which is three times the number of the infantry of the Nandas. Megasthenes puts the total number of the Maurya army at 400,000. There may be a degree of exaggeration in these figures; but even so it is not possible to deny the tremendous increase in the military strength and coercive power of the state which seem to have enhanced the prestige and glamour of the Maurya king.

In the Kautilyan scheme royal order supersedes all other sources of authority including *dharma*, which could be interpreted by the king in the changing contexts of time. Indisputable proof of the all-embracing power of the king is furnished by the Ashokan edicts, which sought to regulate even the social and religious life of the people. Kautilya mentions 18 *tirthas*, who are probably called *mahamatras* or high functionaries. He also provides for 27 superintendents concerned mostly with economic functions; some of them also performed military duties. Further, he refers to the duties of the *gopa*, *sthanika*, *dharmastha*, *nagaraka*, etc. How far the *Arthashastra* provisions were actually put into practice is difficult to ascertain. But there is little doubt that the administrative requirements prompted the Mauryas to increase the number of officers in their employ. All this, together with the growing importance of the warrior class from pre-Mauryan times, may have led to the exaltation of royal power.

The governance of the vast territory with the help of an expanding bureaucracy and a huge standing army involved heavy expenditure. New and permanent sources of income to the imperial exchequer, therefore, had to be found. This seems to have been the guiding principle of the Maurya state in undertaking and regulating numerous economic activities which brought it profit. It founded new settlements and sought to rehabilitate the decaying ones by moving people out of the overpopulated regions. The shudras for the first time were aided by the state to settle as farmers in these settlements. They were either enticed away from other places or were deported from areas where the population density was high. Deportation of 150,000 people after the Kalinga war was apparently in keeping with the Maurya policy of founding new settlements. In order to bring virgin soil under the plough, the shudra settlers were granted fiscal exemptions

or concessions by way of the supply of cattle, seeds and money in the hope of future repayment.

In the newly-settled areas, which formed the crown land or crown village (*sita*), land was granted to retired village officials and priests; but it could not be sold, mortgaged, or inherited. Even ordinary peasants could not reassign their land to non-taxpayers. Failure on the part of the farmers to cultivate the land might lead to its transfer to someone else. Restrictions on the populations of crown villages were doubtless severe, and escape from them was difficult. One could not become an ascetic without passing the age of procreation. Taking to asceticism without providing for one's wife and other dependents was a punishable offence; so was converting a woman to asceticism. Ascetics were not permitted entry into the newly-settled crown village. Members of the lower orders could not form associations or groups. Public entertainment was prohibited; for actors, dancers, singers, musicians, raconteurs, and bards would presumably disturb agricultural operations in the newly colonized areas. The Kautilyan logic is very clear: 'From the helplessness of villagers there comes concentration of men upon their fields, hence increase of taxes, labour supply, wealth and grain.'

Kautilya seems to have deliberately fostered the rusticity of villagers to augment agricultural output so as to achieve the maximum levels of surplus expropriation. The exploitative character of the Maurya state is clearly demonstrated by Kautilya's own words: 'As for settling a land with the four castes, the one where the lowest castes predominate is the better because it will permit all sorts of exploitation.'

In the areas recently brought under the plough a sizeable portion may have constituted the king's domain (*sita*). In the early Pali literature, assignable to the pre-Maurya period, there are only a few references to big farms. But the Mauryas seem to have owned numerous such farms which were worked under the supervision of the superintendent of agriculture (*sitadhyaksha*) with the help of numerous slaves and hired labourers. The state farm, where the superintendent made use of an advanced knowledge of agriculture, was a source of royal income no less than the land cultivated by tax-paying private individuals.

Large-scale clearing of land by the state as well as the cultivation of the crown land under the direct supervision of its officers led to an unprecedented expansion of settled agriculture, especially in the

Gangetic valley. But agricultural progress must have owed a great deal also to the provision of irrigation facilities by the government. The *Arthashastra* refers to the distribution and measurement of water for irrigation; it also mentions a water tax collected regularly by the state wherever it provided assistance in irrigating fields. Pushyagupta, one of the governors of Chandragupta, is said to have built a dam across a river near Girnar in Saurashtra.

The expansion of village settlements under the aegis of the state was necessarily accompanied by the growth of trade, fostered in its turn by the development of the internal communication system. The clearing of land and the founding of new agrarian settlements in what were previously forest regions facilitated movement from one place to another. There is evidence of considerable improvement in communications brought about by the Mauryas. Pataliputra was connected with Nepal via Vaishali. From there a road passed through Champaran to Kapilvastu, Kalsi (Dehradun district), and Hazra; it went up to Peshawar. Megasthenes refers to a road connecting north-western India with Pataliputra, which was linked with Sasaram, Mirzapur, and central India. A route connected the Mauryan capital with Kalinga which in its turn was connected with Andhra and Karnataka. Besides, the rivers of north India provided an easy means of internal transport; the huge Ashokan monolithic pillars, quarried, chiselled, and made cylindrical at Chunar (near Banaras) on the river bank, were probably transported to distant destinations by river. The development of communications within the country helped inland trade just as peaceful relations with the Greeks under Bindusara and Ashoka gave a fillip to foreign trade with the West.

The use of currency in the form of punch-marked coins had begun in the preceding period; now its use became a fairly common feature. Punch-marked coins (mostly silver) of the Maurya period have been discovered in large numbers in different parts of the subcontinent with a heavy concentration in north India, especially in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar which formed the nucleus of the empire, though their profusion and chronology have been questioned without much justification. Money was used not only for trade but also for paying remuneration to officers. The scale of state salaries given in the *Arthashastra*, ranging from 48,000 *panas* to 60 *panas* a year, is thus significant.

If credence is given to the *Arthashastra* evidence, the Maurya state.

exercised a rigid control through a number of superintendents over all trade and industry. The superintendent of commerce (known as *panyadhyaksha* in the *Arthashastra*), whose existence is also indicated by Megesthenes, not only fixed the prices of commodities but also intervened whenever there was a glut of any commodity. The office of the *samsthadhyaksha* (superintendent of markets) was designed to be a safeguard against fraudulent trade practices. The superintendent of weights and measures (*pautavadhyaksha*) was entrusted with the enforcement of standard weights and measures. All state boats were placed under the charge of a superintendent of ships (*navadhyaksha*), who regulated river traffic and collected ferry charges. The superintendent of tolls (*shulkadhyaksha*) collected from the traders customs dues ranging from one-fifth to one-twenty-fifth of the value. Superintendents were also appointed to look after the weaving industry, breweries, and state liquor shops. On the one hand, royal officers controlled and regulated private trade, and on the other, the Maurya state itself engaged in trade and commodity production. State goods (*rajapanya*) were normally to be sold by state servants, but the assistance of private traders was also sought.

The government derived income not only from its own economic undertakings but also from a large number of taxes mentioned in the *Arthashastra*. The land tax (*bhaga*), the chief item of revenue, seems to have been levied at the rate of one-sixth, though the Greek accounts suggest the rate of one-fourth. In addition to the principal land tax, a water cess was also levied. Sharecropping also brought substantial income to the state. The peasants often had to pay the *pindakara*, which was assessed on groups of villages. The nature of such taxes as *bali* and *kara* remains uncertain; the latter was probably a part of the produce from fruit and flower gardens. Villagers were required to supply provisions to the royal army (*senabhakta*) passing through their areas, a practice which anticipated later feudal tyranny.

Hiranya, unlike the above dues, was not paid in kind but in cash. Customs and ferry charges were other important sources of income for the state exchequer. Guilds of artisans living in the capital (*durga*) were made to pay taxes; those in the countryside were presumably granted exemption. It would seem that the state made a deliberate attempt to expropriate as much surplus produce from the people as possible.

But even the numerous taxes mentioned by Kautilya seem to have

fallen short of the needs of the state; for he recommends several fiscal measures for emergency situations. One of these was the levy of *pranaya*, literally a gift of affection, but which in practice may have brought misery to the people. The cultivators could be forced to raise two crops. Although himself a brahmana, Kautilya asks the king to confiscate temple treasures, put up shows of sudden miracles, and set up new images of gods to collect money from the credulous. Patanjali, writing in the second century BC, mentions the Maurya practice of establishing cults for the sake of raising money. All these ordinary and emergency taxes, collected in both cash and kind and deposited in the royal storehouse, formed the economic backbone of the Maurya empire.

An important aspect of the Maurya economy which increased royal power and assisted it in the maintenance of the vast empire was the state monopoly of mining and metallurgy. The *Arthashastra* clearly provides for a superintendent of mines (*akaradhyaksha*), his chief function being to prospect for new mines and reopen old and disused ones. The superintendent of salt, according to Kautilya, looked after the salt mines. Literary references indicate the mining of several metals, notably copper and gold. It is likely that the copper and gold mines in Dhalbhum in Chotanagpur were worked for the first time in the Maurya period. This may have been also the case with the gold mines in Mysore. Judging from a large number of silver punch-marked coins assignable to the time of the Mauryas, it may be suggested that silver mines were also worked. Frequent mention of various forms of iron in the *Arthashastra* provides a clear indication of the working of the metal. As in the preceding period, iron technology may have been a major catalytic agent in the expansion of agriculture as can be inferred from the proliferation of settlements in the Maurya period. The intensive use of iron also provided infrastructure for the large-scale manufacture of punch-marked coins and the deluxe pottery called Northern Black Polished Ware, the introduction of ring wells, and most importantly, for the efflorescence of the pre-Mauryan towns as well as for the rise of new settlements. This view, however, may not be acceptable to scholars who benefit from an advanced technology only to deliberately ignore its significance.

The state enjoyed a monopoly of mines, though a great deal of metal must have been sold to traders, artisans' guilds, goldsmiths, and

individual manufacturers. The monopoly rights of the state over mineral resources gave it exclusive control over the manufacture of metal weaponry and the supply of tools and implements needed for agriculture and industry. This strengthened the power of the Maurya government, particularly in view of the almost complete disarming of the rural population. The Kautilyan injunctions regarding the appointment of a large number of officers, the state control of industry and trade, the government monopoly of mines and metals, and the realization of various forms of revenue from the people give the unmistakable impression that the Maurya state was highly centralized. This assumption has, however, been questioned by several historians in recent years. Admittedly the prescriptive nature of the *Arthashastra* and the uncertain chronology of its various sections make it difficult to determine the actual extent of control exercised by the Mauryas. But the relevant portions of this text read along with the Ashokan edicts and the Greek accounts clearly indicate that centralization of power in the hands of the emperor was the hallmark of the Maurya imperial administration. This is not to suggest that the Maurya kings were able to make their authority felt equally effectively throughout the country. The orders issued from the Maurya court at Pataliputra were possibly more difficult to implement in the remote areas than those issued by the British viceroys or the present-day government of India. But the overemphasis on the alleged decentralized nature of the Maurya administration is perhaps rooted in the neo-colonialist ideas which have invaded Indian historiography in recent years.

The Mauryas created a well-organized state machinery characterized by a stable fiscal system and a reasonably large bureaucracy which functioned in the heartland of their empire. Through their territorial expansion they were also able to facilitate trading and missionary activities. It is probable that the interaction between administrators and Buddhist and Jaina monks on the one hand, and the people of distant parts of the country, on the other, led to the spread of the material culture of the Gangetic valley into the peripheral areas of the empire—a phenomenon amply attested to by archaeological evidence. In spite of this the people in the Maurya empire were living at different levels of cultural development. Its inhabitants ranged from hunter-gatherers in backward areas to the iron-using population of Pataliputra, one of the greatest, if not the greatest city of the world

at that time. The *Arthashastra* of Kautilya and the inscriptions of Ashoka refer to numerous tribes. They had to be won in favour of settled agrarian life and converted into members of a class society based on private property. Kautilya devotes an entire chapter to the methods of systematically breaking up free tribes. In the initial phase dissension was to be sown within the tribe through the use of spies, poison, brahmanas, soothsayers, liquor, women, actors, and cash bribes. But at a later stage the king was to make an armed intervention, break up the tribe, and deport its members to distant lands in units of five to ten families, presumably to settle in the newly colonized areas. It would, however, be wrong to suppose that the tribes broke up only as a result of external violence. Their disintegration may well have been caused by the expansion of settled life in certain areas under the auspices of the state.

In those areas where settled agricultural life came to be established, the social organization was based on the *varna* system. The traditional *varnas* became endogamous; their rigidity may have generated tensions. Megasthenes refers to seven castes—philosophers, farmers, soldiers, herdsmen, artisans, magistrates, and councillors. Evidently he confused caste with occupation. Kautilya enumerates the duties of four castes; in doing this he draws heavily on the prescriptions of earlier Brahmanical lawgivers. The brahmanas enjoyed the highest position in society and several concessions and privileges were recommended for them. This was in contrast to their portrayal in the Buddhist literature as being socially inferior to the kshatriyas. The first three castes—brahmana, kshatriya, and vaishya—were *dvija* (twice-born); theoretically they were more advantaged than the shudras and untouchables. Kautilya refers to no less than fifteen mixed castes by the general name *antyavasayin* (literally living at the end). They are supposed to have originated as a result of miscegenation and lived beyond the pale of the Brahmanical social order. Members of such mixed castes as the Chandala and Svapaka were untouchables; they were required to live outside the main settlement, near the cremation ground. But for the first time during the Maurya period a section of the shudras, hitherto agricultural labourers, were provided with land in the newly colonized areas; they were also employed as sharecroppers on crown lands. Forced labour (*vishti*) was imposed on them on a much larger scale than in the earlier period; a class of government

servants known as *vishtivandhakas* (mentioned for the first time by Kautilya) worked as its procurer.

Kautilya fixes the wages of artisans, who were probably mostly shudras. They seem to have been the worst paid members of society. According to him the slaves (*dasas*) and hired labourers (*karmakaras*) under the employ of the state were to be given 'particles of rice' and bad liquor. He recommends the recruitment of vaishyas and shudras in the army; but their actual enrolment as soldiers is extremely doubtful.

Whether or not slavery existed in Maurya India has been a matter of controversy. Megasthenes tells us that there were no slaves in India. But the *Arthashastra* contains detailed laws about slavery and manumission. Slaves were mostly shudras and supplied the bulk of labour power. In special circumstances members of the higher *varnas* could also be mortgaged; Kautilya refers to them as *ahitakas*. He also lays down rules to regulate the treatment of slaves. His laws relating to the *ahitakas* are liberal. His anxiety to protect the position of the ex-Arya slaves as distinguished from the non-Arya or shudra slaves is understandable; after all Kautilya himself was a brahmana.

The social order, however, did not function as smoothly as envisaged by the Brahmanical lawgivers. Like the brahmanas and kshatriyas, the vaishyas were also *dvijas*, albeit socially inferior to them. Through their participation in trade and commerce the vaishyas acquired wealth; through their trade guilds they often controlled urban institutions. Yet they were denied the social prestige to which they felt entitled. Their support for such heterodox sects as Buddhism and Jainism may have been an expression of their resentment against the two higher castes. The shudras were no less hostile to the upper classes. They were deeply dissatisfied with their living conditions and indulged in criminal activities. Several categories of offenders and suspects listed by Kautilya belonged to the shudra order. He ordains that when a shudra calls himself a brahmana, steals the property of the gods, or is hostile to the king, either his eyes shall be destroyed by the application of a poisonous ointment, or he shall have to pay a fine of 800 *panas*. This implies that some shudras bore hostility to the priestly and ruling classes.

Our sources indicate the existence of several religious sects which may have led to tensions and conflicts. In spite of the growing influence of Buddhism and Jainism, the Vedas did not completely lose

their hold on the people. Kautilya extolled the Vedic way of life. He prescribed Vedic sacraments (*samskaras*) such as *chaulakarma*, *upanayana*, and *godana* for the prince who was expected to perform Vedic sacrifices. There are indications in the *Arthashastra* that several deities were worshipped in temples; this would imply the existence of religious ideas quite different from those found in the Vedas. Among the gods mentioned in the text, Shiva and Samkarshana were later to become central deities in the Brahmanical pantheon; they were referred to by Megasthenes as Dionysus. The Greek ambassador also speaks of Herakles being worshipped in the Mathura region; this god may have been the many-faceted Krishna of later legends. Shri of the *Arthashastra*, identified with Shri-Lakshmi (the wife of Vishnu), may have originally been a non-Aryan fertility goddess who found her way into the Brahmanical religion. According to Kautilya, the worship of these deities consisted of prostration before the image, and gifts (*upahara*), especially of flowers and incense (*pushpachunopahara*); this anticipated the theistic sects which later became popular in various parts of the country. Evidence of the popular belief in malevolent spirits, magical practices, and superstitions of all kinds also find mention in the *Arthashastra*; and perhaps formed a part of the popular culture.

By the fourth century BC Buddhism had emerged as a distinct religion with potential for expansion. Although it had been mainly confined to the regions of Magadha and Koshala before the time of Ashoka, small communities of brethren had spread as far as Mathura and Ujjaini. The Buddhist church was gradually losing its unity on account of expansion. The third Buddhist council convened at Pataliputra marked the final attempt of the sectarian Buddhists to reorganize the church and to exclude dissidents and innovators; it also decided to send missionaries to various parts of the subcontinent. Jainism could not make as much progress, however. Ashokan inscriptions refer to Jainas as Nirgranthas (those who have broken worldly ties); the *Arthashastra* does not mention them at all. Nirgranthas lived in Magadha in the fourth century BC; later tradition speaks of their presence in Pundravardhana (north Bengal) in the time of Ashoka. Perhaps more important than the Jaina was the Ajivika movement, founded by Makkhali Gosala, a contemporary of the Buddha. The Ajivikas seem to have remained important throughout the Maurya period; Ashoka as well as his grandson Dasharatha dedicated some caves to them in the Nagarjuni hills in Bihar.

It appears that diverse religious ideas and practices existed in the vast empire of the Mauryas. But the followers of such sects as Buddhism, Jainism, and Ajivikism were held in contempt by the brahmanas, whose position they must have undermined. Kautilya referred to them by such derogatory terms as *vrishala* and *pashanda.* The *pashandas*, according to him, were to live at the edges of human habitation or near the cremation grounds. He prescribed a heavy fine for inviting Buddhist and Ajivika monks to dinners in honour of deities or dead ancestors. The ideological conflict between the Vedic brahmanas and the followers of the newly born protestant creeds may have been a potential source of social and religious tension, though actual instances of this are unrecorded.

It was against this background that Ashoka expounded his policy of *dhamma* to eliminate social tension and sectarian conflicts, and to promote a harmonious relationship between the diverse elements of the vast empire. *Dhamma* is the Prakrit equivalent of the Sanskrit word *dharma*, translated as religion in modern times. But the term used in the Ashokan edicts has a much wider connotation. It indicates more than mere piety resulting from good deeds inspired by any formal religious faith. Ashoka's insistence on abstinence from killing,

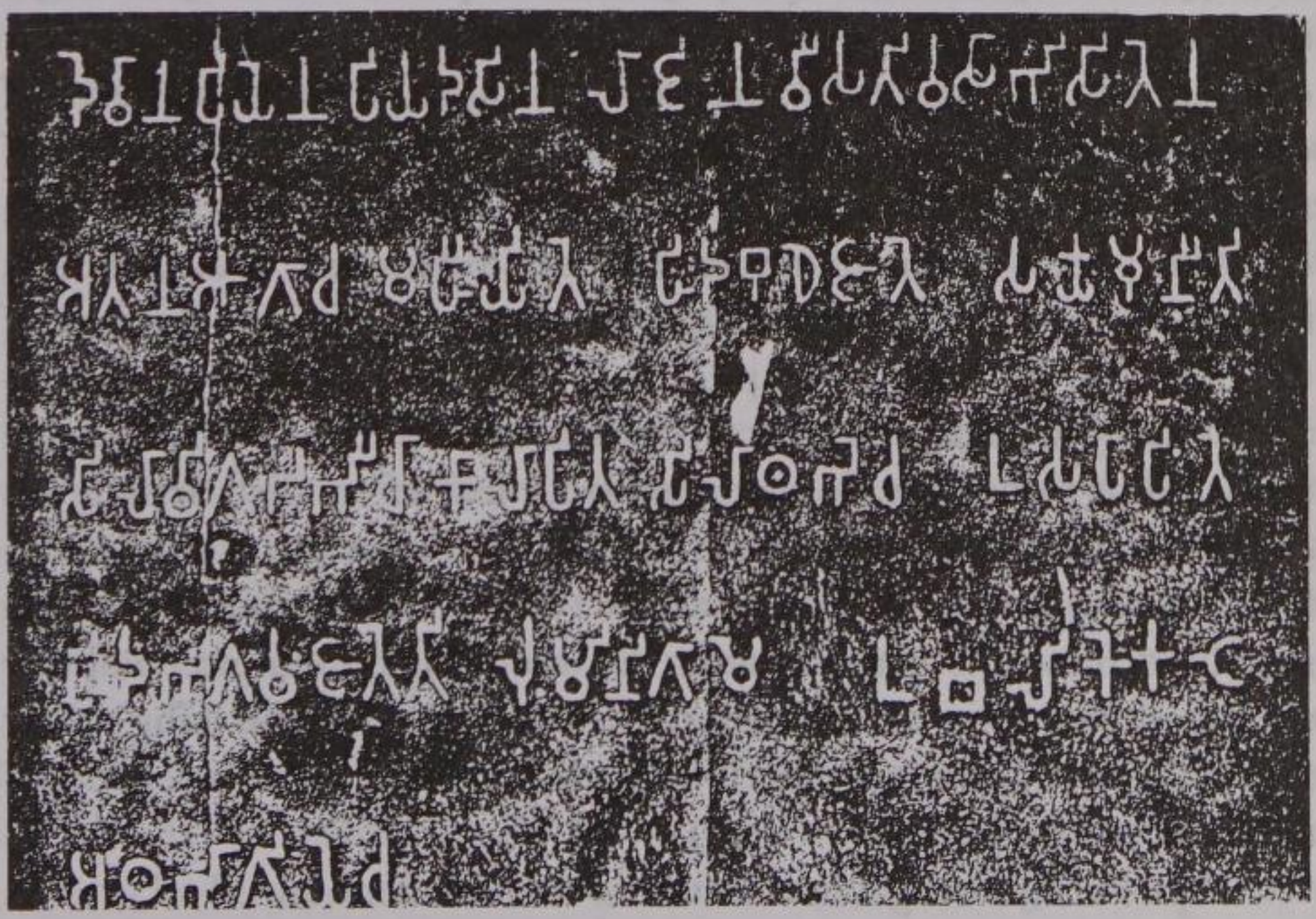

Plate 5: Rumindei Pillar inscription of Ashoka.

considerate relationship between parents and children, elders and young people, friends, masters and servants, and various religious sects, and his excessive concern for the general welfare of the subjects suggest that his *dharma* was an ethical code aimed at fostering an attitude of social responsibility among the people. His policy of *dhamma* sought to make a strong case for the recognition of the dignity of man; it was a plea for the inculcation of virtuous behaviour transcending all social, religious, and cultural barriers. The concept of *dhamma* was very likely conditioned by the vastness of the empire, whose unity would be preserved by overcoming tensions generated by the existence of divergent social, religious, and cultural elements. Ashoka, therefore, laid emphasis on toleration, which was one of the basic principles of *dhamma*. By pleading for 'consideration towards slaves and servants, obedience to mother and father, generosity towards friends, acquaintances and relatives and towards priests and monks', Ashoka sought to promote harmony in the family and the community. Religious eclecticism occupies an important place in his rescripts. He claims to have honoured all sects as well as both ascetics and laymen with gifts and various forms of recognition. In the thirteenth year of his reign he donated two caves in the Barabar hills (Gaya district in Bihar) to the Ajivikas. In the eyes of the emperor, however, far more important than gifts and honours to different religious sects was their essential advancement. This, according to him, could be achieved if one desisted from extolling one's own sect and disparaging that of another. By not permitting the free expression of differences of opinion one may very often aggravate concealed tensions. But Ashoka's insistence on their suppression may be understood in the context of the need for unity in the empire.

Contrary to this emphasis on toleration, Ashoka banned festive meetings or gatherings, perhaps due to his fear of conflicts arising out of differences of opinion; only those sponsored by the state seem to have been permissible. The measure was in conformity with the strictly centralized administration of the Maurya empire. Popular meetings could be utilized to criticize and attack the king's new ideas. Their suppression therefore, seems to have been intended to stifle popular opposition.

In spite of his religious eclecticism Ashoka denounced all 'useless

ceremonies and sacrifices' held under the influence of superstition. He was particularly critical of such ceremonies as were performed during illness, at the birth or marriage of a child, or when setting out on a journey. Women were especially censured for observing religious and nonsensical rites. Ashoka's attack on ritual and sacrifice was probably intended to undermine the influence of the priest who presided over them and who benefited from people's trust in popular superstition.

Ashoka's *dhamma* also emphasized non-violence. Overwhelmed by the horror of the Kalinga war he is said to have renounced all further bloodshed, though it seems likely that his remorse over the war grew over the years and was not apparent immediately after. In one of his edicts he prohibits animal slaughter, though he is silent about the cow, presumably because it had not yet attained the sanctity which it came to acquire in later times. If this order applied only to the state sanctuaries of certain animals, as has been suggested, then Ashoka's measure would seem to be merely a continuation of the policy of Kautilya according to whom the killing of animals listed as inviolable was a punishable offence. It is more likely that Ashoka sought to prevent only the ritual sacrifice of animals and did not contemplate a general prohibition of animal slaughter; for he states that two peacocks and a deer were killed daily in the royal kitchen. This measure obviously hit the interests of the brahmanas, for whom animal sacrifice was a source of livelihood. In spite of his renunciation of war and his imposition of a check on the killing of animals for ritual purposes, Ashoka did not wholly abjure violence. In dealing with the troublesome forest tribes he clearly recognized the possibility of the use of violence.

The policy of *dhamma* included several measures relating to social welfare. After the tenth year of his reign when he visited Bodh Gaya, Ashoka inaugurated the system of royal tours (*dhammayatra*). Through these tours he came into contact with the masses, explained his policies to them, and also took interest in their general well-being. The edict at Brahmagiri was issued by the emperor while on tour, which indicates that he journeyed to the southernmost parts of his realm. Royal excursions in the outlying areas of the empire also acted as a check on local officials. In addition, every high administrative

Plate 6: The Sarnath lion-capital carved
for the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka
in the third century BC.

official throughout the empire was ordered to undertake a tour every five years.

To implement his policy of *dhamma* Ashoka created a new class of officers known as *dhammamahamattas* (Sanskrit, *dharmamahamatras*), who were given control over officials and special funds. They were active not only in and around Pataliputra but also in remote frontier areas and among the neighbouring peoples. They looked into the complaints of law abiding groups and sects, ensured fair treatment to them, and attended to the welfare of prisoners. Some of them were especially appointed to take care of Buddhists, brahmanas, Ajivikas and Nirgranthas. These officers were directly responsible for the implementation of the policy of *dhamma*. They were permitted entry into the houses of all sections of society, including those of the royal family. Perhaps the power of the *dhammamahamattas* to interfere in the lives of the people increased over the years. Ashoka also tried to propagate his religious ideology through his edicts inscribed on rocks or monolithic pillars.

Plate 7: Yakshi chauri-bearer. Didarganj, Patna, *c.* third-second century BC. Polished sandstone. Ht: 160 cm, 204 cm with pedestal. Patna Museum, Patna.

Ashoka's religion greatly influenced art; according to the Buddhist tradition he constructed 84,000 *stupas*, but this figure need not be taken literally. The best specimens of contemporary art are the tall monolithic, highly polished columns, standing free in space, often crowned with animal figures. At least fourteen such pillars are known; a few of them may date from before the time of Ashoka. All Maurya columns are chiselled out of grey Chunar sandstone and possess a lustrous polish perhaps because of the application of silicious varnish on the stone. It has been suggested that at or near Chunar an art

centre was established and patronized by the Maurya court. An important function of these columns seems to have been to impress and overawe the people with the power and majesty of the Maurya monarchs. This may explain the imposing stateliness of the pillars and of the animal figures crowning them.

The architectural remains of the Maurya period are few. Excavations at Kumrahar (Patna) have brought to light a Maurya palace with a pillared hall, which owed its design to the Hall of a Hundred Columns built by Darius (550-486 BC) at Parsepolis (Iran). According to the dominant view, the main inspiration of Maurya art was Persian imperial art. However, lacking social roots, it failed to influence later artistic developments in India. But in the sphere of cave architecture the Mauryas seem to have made a lasting contribution. The excavated halls of the Barabar and Nagarjuni caves belong to the time of Ashoka and his successor Dashratha; later cave architecture owed a great deal to them. Several stone sculptures found in and around Patna have been ascribed to the Maurya period, though this has been questioned by some scholars. The most sophisticated of these sculptures is the statue of a voluptuous female *chauri* (fly-whisk) bearer found at Didarganj near Patna. Unlike the imperial stone-carving tradition which may have touched only a minority of inhabitants, terracotta was a popular medium for sculpture, pottery, ornaments, and toys. But no comprehensive study of the Maurya terracotta art has so far been undertaken.

Towards the end of his reign Ashoka's grip over the imperial organization became weak. His policy of *dhamma* failed to achieve the desired goal; social tensions continued. Taxila, which had revolted earlier during his father's reign, was goaded to rebellion again by ministerial oppression. Prince Kunala was most probably sent to suppress the uprising, and the Buddhist legends depicting him as being blinded at the instigation of his proud and lustful stepmother, whose infatuation for him remained unreciprocated, need not be taken seriously. That official high-handedness may have often led to popular resentment is also implied by Ashoka's own edict addressed to his *mahamattas* at Dhauli and Jaugada in Kalinga.

The Maurya empire began to decline with the death of Ashoka in 232 BC; soon after it broke up. The empire was divided into western and eastern halves. The western part, according to one view, was

ruled by Kunala and then for a while by Samprati. It was threatened from the north-west by the Bactrian Greeks, to whom it was practically lost by 180 BC. From the south the Andhras or Satavahanas posed the threat; they later came to power in the Deccan. The eastern part of the Maurya empire, with its capital at Pataliputra, continued to be governed for nearly half a century by Ashoka's successors. Brihadratha was the last ruler in the main line of the Mauryas. He is said to have been slain in 181-180 BC by his brahmana general Pushyamaitra Shunga, who founded an independent dynasty.

Ashoka has been blamed for bringing about the disintegration of the empire. His pro-Buddhist policy is said to have antagonized the brahmanas. But his general administrative policy was neither specifically pro-Buddhist nor pronouncedly anti-brahmana. Ashoka's supposed obsession with non-violence is said to have led to the weakening of the Maurya army. This, however, is hardly warranted by his rescripts. The decline of the Maurya empire may largely be ascribed to the economic consequences of Ashoka's policy. After the conquest of Kalinga the emperor fought no wars; the army was used only for parades and public spectacles. The huge army became superfluous and much too costly to maintain. The pre-Ashokan bureaucracy itself was very large; Ashoka added substantially to its size by appointing many new officers, who, unlike those mentioned in the *Arthashastra*, had nothing to do with the organization of production. His charitable public works, doubtless indicative of his paternal affection for the people, only strained the state exchequer. His extravagant charity to the Buddhist church proved ruinous for the state as well as for him. According to a legend, it drove him to penury in his last days when he was left with half a mango. The emperor's lavish philanthropy was also alluded to by Fa-hsien several centuries later.

While the state treasury was being drained of its wealth, the mounting expenditure of administration had to be met by the limited revenues derived from the established agrarian economy of the Gangetic valley; the peninsular region was not yet fully colonized and could not, therefore, yield much revenue to the state. Even in the Magadhan heartland large-scale land clearance must have led to the thinning out of forests. Deforestation meant increasing floods which in turn led to the damaging of crops, and hence to a complete loss of revenue as well as a drain of the state finances for relief measures.

Much of all this may sound conjectural. But the decreasing silver content of the punch-marked coins attributed to the later Maurya rulers indicates the debasement of currency—a measure necessary to meet the needs of a depleted treasury. Thus the ultimate political disintegration of the Maurya empire may be said to have been caused in a large measure by the gradual weakening of the imperial finances, notwithstanding the obdurate denial of any pressure on the Maurya economy by some historians.

CHAPTER 7

Of Invasions, Trade, and Culture
c. 200 BC–AD 300

The reconstruction of the history of the subcontinent after the Maurya rule is based on a variety of sources. The dynastic genealogies found in the early Puranas, whose compilation may have begun during the early centuries of the Christian era, throw light on the political history of the times; their value is enhanced when corroborated by inscriptions. Although the Dharmashastra works composed during the post-Maurya period are normative, they do provide the basic material for understanding the changing social structure. The foremost of these treatises is the lawbook of Manu (*Manusmriti*). The epigraphic records in Kharoshthi found in large numbers in Gandhara and Central Asia refer to different facets of India's regular contacts with these regions. Pieces of information may also be culled from such texts as the *Gargi Samhita* and the *Mahabhashya* of Patanjali. The Buddhist Jatakas, *Divyavadana, Mahavastu*, and the *Milindpanho* (Sanskrit, *Milindaprashna*) are equally useful. Sometimes even such late works as the *Malavikagnimitra* of Kalidasa and the *Harshacharita* of Banabhatta provide some information bearing on the period after the overthrow of the Mauryas. Coins bearing the names of rulers appeared in the first century BC and are of immense value for the study of political history, and more importantly, for appreciating the significance of social and economic developments. Roman coins discovered in the subcontinent enable us to understand the pattern of trade between India and the Western world—a theme which cannot be studied without the classical Graeco-Roman accounts. The most well known of these accounts is the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* written by an anonymous Greek seafarer. The early Tamil literature, known as the Shangam, throws light on the process of social and political transformation in the far south. In addition to these sources, the vast

body of material recovered from explorations and excavations of nearly 150 sites during the last half century and the impressive testimony of art and architecture both within the country and outside, are of great help in reconstructing the social and cultural history of the period.

Though marked by the absence of a large empire comparable to that of the Mauryas, the five centuries following their rule were historically important and witnessed significant developments. Contacts with Central and West Asia as well as with China and, to a certain extent, with South-East Asia, promoted an active interaction between India and the outside world, leading to the assimilation of elements which added new dimensions to Indian culture and enriched it in many ways. During this phase there emerged several political entities in different parts of the country; some of them, especially in the Deccan and the southern tip of the Indian peninsula, were exposed to the process of state formation perhaps for the first time.

In north India the immediate successors of the Mauryas were the Shungas, a brahmana family of obscure origin. Very likely they came from the region of Ujjain, where they had served the Mauryas. Pushyamitra, a general of the last Maurya king Brihadratha, succeeded in gaining power by slaying his master. The centre of his kingdom was Vidisha in present-day Madhya Pradesh. He is described as an enthusiastic supporter of the orthodox Brahmanical faith, and is said to have performed two *ashvamedha* sacrifices. Buddhist literature portrays him as a persecutor of Buddhists and destroyer of their monasteries and places of worship. Pushyamitra, we are told, destroyed the 84,000 *stupas* said to have been built by Ashoka. This, however, is contradicted by the Buddhist remains at Bharhut, assignable to the time of the Shungas. The stories of his persecution of Buddhists obviously betray a sectarian bias.

The Shungas fought a number of wars. They campaigned against the kingdom of Vidarbha (Berar) in the northern Deccan. In the north-west they fought the Greeks. In the south-east they may have led expeditions against the king of Kalinga, but this has been questioned by some scholars. The Shunga dominions comprised the entire Gangetic valley and extended to the river Narmada. The cities of Pataliputra, Ayodhya, and Vidisha were included in the Shunga kingdom; according to a Buddhist work, Jallundur and Sakala (Sialkot)

INDIA IN ABOUT A.D. 150

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KUSHANAS EMPIRE	
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Madras
CHERAS
CHOLAS
PANDYAS
LAKSHADWEEP (India)
INDIAN OCEAN
ANDAMAN and NICOBAR ISLANDS (India)

SCALE 500 km.
300 miles

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were also incorporated in it. Within a hundred years, however, the kingdom of the Shungas was reduced to the confines of Magadha. Here another brahmana family, that of the Kanvas, succeeded them and precariously held on to the territory until 28 BC.

The fall of the two brahmana dynasties was followed by the rise of the independent principalities of Ayodhya, Kaushambi, Mathura, and Ahichchhatra (all in Uttar Pradesh). The tribal states which had earlier succumbed to the might of the Mauryas now seem to have reasserted themselves, even if temporarily. To the south-east of Mathura, the Arjunayanas established their independence towards the end of the Shunga period. In the Panjab also the existence of a number of tribal polities is attested to by numismatic evidence. The Audumbaras occupied the land between the upper courses of the Ravi and the Beas. The Kunindas became prominent in the area between the Beas and the Yamuna near the foot of the Sivalik hills. The region between the Ravi and the Sutlej, corresponding to the modern Jalandhar division of the Panjab, was under the Trigartas. The country between the Sutlej and the Yamuna, comprising the present-day districts of Ludhiana, Ambala, Karnal, Rohtak, and Hissar, was held by the Yaudheyas, famous as professional warriors and known to Panini, who lived in about the fifth century BC. To the west of the Yaudheya territory lay the region controlled by the Agastyas.

The most important political development of the post-Maurya period, however, was a series of movements from across the north-western borders. The first to cross the Hindukush were the Bactrian Greeks. They were known in early Indian literature as the Yavanas; the word was derived from the old Persian *Yauna*, signifying originally the Ionian Greeks but later all people of Greek origin. Already during the rule of the Achaemenids the Asiatic Greeks had settled in Bactria (Balkh). More Greek settlements came into being during the time of Alexander and his general Seleukos Nikator. About the middle of the third-century BC Diodotus, the governor of Bactria, revolted against the Seleucid king Antiochus. After an unsuccessful attempt to subjugate Bactria Antiochus III eventually recognized its independence and gave a Seleucid bride to the great-grandson of Diodotus in 200 BC. The Seleucid ruler, however, was able to cross the Hindukush mountains; he is said to have defeated the Maurya ruler Subhagasena in 206 BC.

The north-western region of India did not lose its attraction for the Greeks. In the early second century BC Demetrius, son of Euthedemus, pressed further into India. He and his successors led several campaigns into India; one such, perhaps under king Menander, is said to have reached Pataliputra. Menander ruled from 155 to 130 BC and gave some kind of stability to the Indo-Greek power in India. His coins have been found as far apart as Kabul in Afghanistan and Mathura near Delhi. His kingdom is said to have comprised the Swat valley, and the Hazara district in the north-west, and the Panjab as far as the river Ravi. Menander was the best known among the Indo-Greek kings. He attained fame as Milinda in the Buddhist text, *Milindapanho* (*Milindaprashna*, literally *The Questions of King Milinda*), which records discussions with the philosopher Nagasena that resulted in his conversion to Buddhism. His death was followed by a brief period of regency after which Strato became the king. Soon thereafter the Greek ascendancy in the north-west waned. The Greeks, no doubt, failed to ensure their long-lasting political authority in India, but the significance of their rule cannot be minimized. They were the first to issue coins in large numbers which, unlike the punch-marked coins, could be attributed to kings with certainty. They were also the first rulers to mint gold coins, which increased subsequently during the time of the Kushana rulers. The short spell of their dominion in the north-western parts of the country is thus important in the monetary history of India. But its significance also lay in the fact that the Greeks introduced features of Hellenistic art in the north-western part of the subcontinent; this culminated in the development of what is known as the Gandhara school of art.

The Indo-Greek power in north-western India did not survive for long. It succumbed to the nomadic tribes known as the Scythians who were forced by climatic and political factors to move out from Central Asia. The presence of the Chinese empire consolidated under Shi Huang Ti, who built the Great Wall, as well as the drying up of their pastures drove nomads, including the Yueh-Chi, westward. Pressed from both the north and the east, the Scythians attacked Bactria and occupied it. Close on their heels were the Yueh-Chi. Therefore, the Scythians, known as the Shakas in Patanjali's *Mahabhasya* and in other early Indian sources, moved from Bactria and invaded Iran and then the Greek kingdoms in India. By the middle of the first century BC

only a few Greek chiefs ruled in India, and several branches of the Shakas controlled a much larger part of India than the Greeks did. They do not seem to have met effective resistance. Tradition has it that a king of Ujjain drove them out for a while, called himself Vikramaditya, and established the Vikrama era to commemorate his victory over them in 57 BC. How far this is reliable is difficult to say, for we have no less than fourteen Vikramadityas in Indian history up to the twelfth century. In all probability the Shakas extended their power as far into the country as Mathura. The first Shaka king was Maues or Moga (*c.* 80 BC) who is known from inscriptions and a series of coins. There is evidence to suggest the establishment of the relics of the Buddha in a *stupa* at Taxila during his period. The most important Shaka ruler in India was Rudradaman who exercised control over Sindh, Kutch, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Konkan, and the Narmada valley as well as Malwa, Kathiawar, and the western Deccan. He is famous for repairing the Sudarshana lake which was in use for irrigation in the semi-arid zone of Kathiawad from the time of the Mauryas. Rudradaman was the first king to issue a long inscription in chaste Sanskrit. The first ruler to elevate Sanskrit to the status of a court language was thus a king whose origins can be traced to a region outside India.

Towards the close of the first century BC a line of kings with Iranian names, usually known as the Pahlavas or the Indo-Parthians, gained control of north-western India. The best known of this group of kings is Gondopharnes who probably ruled in the first century AD. To his court came St. Thomas, through whom India first came into contact with Christianity. The Christian missionary, according to later Christian sources, moved to Kerala and finally achieved martyrdom at Mylapur near Chennai where he is said to have been assassinated. His proselytizing mission is not well documented, but the Christian association of Gondopharnes is highly probable. It has been suggested that he was the same as Kaspar, one of the Three Kings of the East, who played an important role in Christian tradition. We do not have much information about his immediate successor, his nephew Abdagases. But the Parthians, like the Shakas who had preceded them, were assimilated into Indian society.

The Indo-Parthian power, however, broke up with the advance of the Yueh-Chi people. From a Chinese source we learn that in the

first century the Yueh-Chi chief Kujula Kadphises united the five tribes of the Yueh-Chi, crossed the Hindukush mountains, and established himself in Kabul and Kashmir; he is credited with the defeat of the last of the Greek kings in Kabul. Kujula died at the age of 80. His son Vima Kadphises succeeded him. Vima issued gold coins, which influenced subsequent Kushana monetary policy; for after him the Kushanas minted basically in gold and copper.

After a brief interregnum the house of Kanishka, whose relationship with the two preceding kings is uncertain, succeeded that of Kadphises. The provenance of the gold coins of the Kushanas and of their inscriptions indicates that they had established their sway not only over north-western India and Sindh but also over the greater part of the Gangetic valley. Kanishka was the most famous ruler of the Kushana dynasty. Under him the Kushanas reached the height of their power and became a mighty force in the contemporary world. In India his suzerainty extended as far south as Sanchi and as far east as Banaras. In Central Asia his dominions were extensive. Purushapur (Peshawar) was his capital, Mathura being the second most important city of the empire. The date of his accession is a matter of inconclusive debate but AD 78 seems to be the most probable of the dates suggested so far. This year marks the beginning of an era that came to be known as the Shaka era; the recent suggestion that it began in AD 120 or 144 is far from convincing.

Kanishka is often remembered for his association with Buddhism. Himself a Buddhist convert, he convened the fourth Buddhist council in Kashmir to discuss matters relating to theology and doctrine. He encouraged missionary activities; Buddhist missions were sent to Central Asia and China. Kanishka is said to have constructed at Peshawar a multistoreyed tower enshrining a relic of the Buddha. The Chinese traveller Hsüan Tsang, who came to India in the seventh century, gives a detailed account of the *stupa*. Even at the time of Al-Beruni (eleventh century) it was a vivid memory. Excavations at Peshawar have provided a plan of the *stupa*, the location of the *vihara*, a few examples of figurative sculpture in stone and stucco, and the celebrated Kanishka reliquary.

Several Buddhist theologians are associated with Kanishka—Ashvaghosha, Vasumitra, Parshva, Sangharaksha, Dharmatrata, and Matricheta. But Kanishka's patronage of Buddhism seems to have

been essentially political. Legends apart, there is very little evidence to suggest that his conversion to Buddhism was a profound experience. Buddhist emblems appear on his coins, but they are few and are far outnumbered by other types of coins bearing the images of non-Buddhist and non-Indian deities. This is indicative of a policy of religious syncretism which was necessary to promote the existing variety of cultures and religious traditions in Kanishka's far-flung empire and to encourage a peaceful interaction among them. Kanishka is traditionally believed to have died fighting in Central Asia. The Chinese annals speak of a Kushana king who had asked for a Han princess in marriage and who was defeated by the general Pan Chao towards the end of the first century AD. That king may have been Kanishka. His successors ruled for a hundred years, but Kushana power declined under them. About the middle of the third century AD a king of the Sassanian dynasty of Persia defeated Vasudeva, one of Kanishka's descendants, and reduced the Kushanas to a subordinate position.

Meanwhile, new kingdoms had come into being in the region to the south-east of the Chotanagpur plateau and in the Deccan. One of them was Kalinga. First conquered by the Nandas and then re-conquered by Ashoka, it contained a Maurya provincial headquarters at Tosali, and its people lived in a phase when no organized state had come into being. The interaction between the autochthonous elements and the Maurya power, however, accelerated the process of state formation in the region and Kalinga emerged as an independent state towards the end of the second century BC under a ruling house of the Mahameghavahanas. Under Kharavela, the third ruler of this line, in the middle of the first century BC it achieved political prominence and remained a source of trouble to the Magadhan rulers for some time. A long inscription of Kharavela from Hathigumpha, engraved on the Udayagiri hills near Bhuvaneswar, enables us to reconstruct his biography despite its being in a poor state of preservation. According to this record he was a Jaina by faith, though given to military conquests. He defeated the king of the western Deccan, occupied Rajagriha in the north, and conquered Magadha. He attacked the Greeks in the north-west, and overran the Pandyan kingdom in the south and sent an expedition to Bharatavarsha, a term which occurs for the first time in Kharavela's record and whose geographical

connotation remains vague. Kharavela enlarged an irrigation canal originally dug by a Nanda king and spent large sums of money on the welfare of his subjects. After him Kalinga lapsed into political oblivion for several centuries. Though Pliny (died AD 79) refers to the Kalingas (Calingae) as being divided into several branches, and substantial archaeological material has been unearthed in Orissa after 1947, no coherent reconstruction of political developments in the region is possible.

In the north-western Deccan arose the kingdom of the Satavahanas in the first century BC, with its centre at Pratishthana (Paithan in Maharashtra). Since the Satavahanas were also known as the Andhras, it is suggested that they originated in the Andhra region whence they moved up the river Godavari, took advantage of the disintegration of the Maurya empire, and established themselves in the west. But according to another view they originally belonged to the western Deccan and gradually extended their territorial jurisdiction towards the eastern coast, which was therefore called Andhra in course of time. Since the earliest inscriptions of the Satavahanas are found in the western Deccan, the latter view may be correct.

The Andhras are mentioned first in the *Aitareya Brahmana* and then in the records of Ashoka. Later, along with a few other tribal groups, they figure in the epics and Puranas. Probably they occupied the Deccan region around the middle of the first millennium BC or slightly earlier as iron-using people with several ceramic traditions. Their graves were encircled by big pieces of stone and they are therefore known as the megalithic people. They may have been exposed to the process of a major social and political transformation as a result of the expansion of the Mauryas into the peninsular India, where they were primarily interested in mining gold, diamonds and gems. The demand for these commodities gave rise to market centres like Dharanikota on the Krishna in Guntur district (Andhra Pradesh) and Karad in Satara district (Maharashtra). This led to the southward diffusion of the material culture of the Gangetic valley with consequent disruption of local tribal groups. Many chiefs known as Maharathis became important in different pockets and were related by marriage to the Satavahanas under whom the first state developed in the Deccan. It is likely that they held important positions under the Mauryas whose influence can be seen on the Satavahana polity.

The first Satavahana king, Simuka, is believed to have destroyed the Shunga power. But the Shakas of the Kshaharata clan drove the Satavahanas out of the western Deccan. Coins and inscriptions of the Shaka chief Nahapana have been found around Nasik, indicating Shaka dominance in the area towards the close of the first century AD or the beginning of the second. The Satavahanas under the greatest of their rulers, Gautamiputra Shatakarni, however, recovered their western possessions. Gautamiputra and his son Vasishthiputra (who ruled in the first half of the second century) extended their territory and gave the Satavahanas a position of eminence. Gautamiputra is said to have destroyed the power of the Shakas and the pride of the kshatriyas, promoted the interests of the twice-born, and stopped the mixing of the four *varnas*. In spite of this claim, a matrimonial alliance was concluded in an effort to resolve the conflict between the Shakas and the Satavahanas. Rudradaman of the western Shaka dynasty, ruling in the mid-second century in Rajasthan and Sindh, gave his daughter in marriage to the Satavahana king. The purpose of the alliance, however, was far from achieved. One of the records states that Rudradaman twice defeated a Satavahana adversary in battle but did not kill him because of a close relationship. Following the death of Rudradaman, the Satavahanas successfully attacked Shaka territory and regained their lost possessions. Towards the end of the second century the Satavahanas ruled over Kathiawad on the west coast and the Krishna delta and northern Tamilnadu in the south-east.

The third century saw the gradual weakening of Satavahana power, as local governors began to claim independent status. After their fall a number of kingdoms came into being. In the north-western Deccan the Abhiras came into prominence; in Maharashtra and Kuntala the Chutus and after them the Kadambas became powerful. The Ikshvakus established themselves in Andhradesha; in the south-eastern part of the former Satavahana empire the Pallavas founded an independent dynasty and expanded into a great power by the middle of the sixth century. The Vakatakas became powerful in the region of Vidarbha (Berar).

The transition from tribe to incipient state in the deep south seems to have taken several centuries. Around the middle of the first millennium BC or even earlier, the uplands of Tamilnadu, like eastern Andhra Pradesh, were occupied by the iron-using megalithic people

who are generally known by their graves. Their grave goods include both weapons and agricultural tools and implements. Initially the megalithic people, according to the archaeological evidence, practised agriculture on a limited scale and produced paddy and *ragi*. The Shangam texts, however, give us a better idea of their subsistence strategies which were conditioned by the different ecological zones (*tinai*) in which they lived. In the fertile riparian plains (*marutam*), where they reclaimed land, they took to agriculture on a large scale and practised wet paddy cultivation. In the hilly backwoods (*kurinchi*) hunting and gathering were the mainstay of their existence. Plunder and cattle raids were common in the parched lands (*palai*). In the pastoral tracts (*mullai*) animal husbandry and shifting agriculture were practised. Fishing and salt manufacturing were the chief occupations in the coastal region (*neital*). The small and generally self-sustaining eco-zones grew into larger ones through mutual interaction and interdependence which undermined the ethos of tribal egalitarianism and paved the way for the rise of social classes and dominant chiefdoms. This process was accelerated by trade; for the Tamils took to the sea very early. By the second century BC they had twice invaded Sri Lanka and occupied its north-eastern parts for a while. At about this time they came in touch with South-East Asia; in the first century AD their contact with the Western world grew through a flourishing trade.

A catalytic agent in the transformation of chiefdoms into inchoate states may have been the contact between north India and the southern tip of the peninsula. Traders, conquerors, and Jaina, Buddhist, and brahmana missionaries who carried along with them the elements of their material culture promoted interaction between the north and the south. The evidence of this contact begins to be available from the fourth century BC when Megasthenes refers to the Pandyans. Their territory, he tells us, was famous for pearls and was ruled by a woman; this implies some matriarchal influence in the Pandyan society. The inscriptions of Ashoka unambiguously mention the Cholas, Pandyas, Keralaputras, and Satiyaputras as lying outside his empire. Of these the identification of only the Satiyaputras is not known; that of the remaining three is certain. The Chola (Coromandel), Pandya (the south-eastern tip of the peninsula) and Chera or Kerala (Malabar) kingdoms are known to have existed in the post-Maurya period.

INDIA

(C. 200 B.C.-- A.D. 300)

INDEX

ANCIENT TOWN	●
MODERN TOWN	O
NATIONAL BOUNDARY	~.~.

BAMIYAN
GANDHARA
KABUL
PURUSHAPURA
TAXILA
Srinagar
SAKALA
Indus R.
MATHURA
SHRAVASTI
AYODHYA
KAUSHAMBI
MALWA
BANARAS
PATALIPUTRA
GAYA
Ganga R.
Brahmaputra R.
KATHIAWAR
VIDISHA
SANCHI
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Narmada R.
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ARABIAN SEA
BAY OF BENGAL
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NAGARJUNAKONDA
AMARAVATI
KOLAR
Madras
Cauvery R.
ARIKAMEDU
KAVERIPATTANAM
URAIYUR
MADURAI
LAKSHADWEEP (India)
ANDAMAN and NICOBAR ISLANDS (India)
INDIAN OCEAN

SCALE 500 km.
300 miles

N
W E
S

Kharavela speaks of defeating the Tamil confederacy, which may have consisted of these three kingdoms. In the *Mahabharata* the three kingdoms are stated to have fought at Kurukshetra; this was obviously an attempt to give them an aura of antiquity. Although the Shangam texts indicate that the Cheras, Cholas, and Pandyas were in a continual state of warfare, monarchy tended to stabilize through royal sacrifices, generous gifts to brahmanas who fabricated a fictitious ancestry for the rulers, and bardic paeans which enhanced royal prestige. The most famous of the kings mentioned in the early Shangam texts was the Chola ruler Karikala (second century AD) who founded the Chola capital at Puhar (Kaveripattanam); it emerged as a great centre of trade, especially in cotton. He is said to have led many victorious campaigns and is described in a Shangam text as giving lavish gifts and performing Vedic sacrifices.

The political history of India from the first century BC to the third century AD gives a confusing picture of a welter of contending tribes, kings, and invaders. Most of the kingdoms in the post-Maurya period were small ones. But the Shaka-Kushanas in the north and the north-west and the Satavahanas in the Deccan ruled over large areas. They did not exercise the rigid centralized control over their territories as the Mauryas are believed to have done earlier. The Kushanas entered into a feudatory relationship with a number of small kings. They divided their empire into satrapies, each under the administrative jurisdiction of a satrap with whom they entered into a feudatory relationship. They also seem to have practised a hereditary dual rule; in some cases a father and his son ruled at one and the same time. The grandiloquent titles adopted by the Kushanas indicate the existence of many lesser kings, who paid homage and tribute to the paramount ruler. Offering of military service by them was not unlikely because the Shakas and Kushanas were excellent horsemen; in fact, they introduced into India a better cavalry and the use of the horse on a large scale. The Satavahanas had several vassals such as the Maharathis and the Ikshvakus who founded independent kingdoms on the ruins of the domains of their overlords.

The centrifugal forces of the post-Maurya period were sought to be counterbalanced by the association of divine elements with the ruler. In the earlier periods gods were often compared with princes; now kings came to be compared with gods. In a Satavahana record

Gautamiputra Shatakarni is compared to several gods in prowess. The analogy emphasizes the divine aspects of kingship, which received even greater emphasis in subsequent times. The Kushana rulers also tried to deify themselves, as is clear from their title *devaputra* (son of god). Perhaps under Roman influence, they also followed the practice of erecting mortuary temples to house statues of dead kings (*devakula*). The cult of the dead king, however, did not find a congenial soil in India. The indigenous writings of the period frequently refer to the divine origin of kingship. But the deification of the king did not substantially add to his authority and administrative hold over the country.

On their part the Satavahanas started the practice of donating land with fiscal and administrative immunities to brahmanas and Buddhist monks, which eventually weakened their central authority. Reference to gifts of land to priests is found in earlier literature, but the earliest inscriptional evidence for a land grant in India belongs to the first century BC, when the Satavahanas bestowed villages (*grama*) on priests for officiating at Vedic sacrifices. Initially such grants were accompanied by exemption from the payment of taxes. But gradually the Satavahanas seem to have also surrendered the administrative rights to the donees. In a record of the second century AD the Satavahana ruler Gautamiputra Shatakarni is said to have instructed royal officials not to interfere with the administration of a donated field or village. In such a situation the beneficiaries were free to manage the administrative affairs in the donated areas. The gift villages thus tended to become semi-independent administrative pockets, which enfeebled royal control over the countryside.

Land grants were ostensibly made on religious grounds. But the underlying idea of donating land was to extend the area of cultivation through private efforts. A large number of new settlements, therefore, came into being in the agriculturally rich and fertile areas of the Satavahana territory, their major concentration being around Nasik, Junar, Karle, and in the upper Krishna valley around Kolhapur. These settlements provided a much needed resource base for the ports on the western coast which handled the bulk of India's trade with the Mediterranean during the early centuries of the Christian era.

The Satavahanas did not possess the vast bureaucracy of the Mauryas. They could not, therefore. regulate various economic activities, as the

Mauryas had done. The clearing of forests and the founding of new settlements under the aegis of the state was not possible, and agricultural expansion depended on individual efforts. A contemporary Buddhist work refers to individual farmers in large numbers working hard and engaged in cultivation. The investment of physical labour in a piece of unclaimed land made the individual its owner. According to Manu, the most important lawgiver of the period whose prescriptions have influenced Indian society for centuries and which have created a ferment in our own times, a field belonged to him who first cleared the timber and a deer to him who first wounded it. The principle was very likely enunciated to encourage the cultivation of virgin land by private individuals.

From the economic point of view, the most striking development of the period was the thriving trade between India and the Western world. The Mauryas, who are said to have greatly improved internal communications, had provided the initial basis for the growth of trade. To them is attributed the construction of the royal highway from Pataliputra to Taxila. Pataliputra was connected by road to Tamralipti (Tamluk) in the Gangetic delta, the chief port for ships sailing to Myanmar and Sri Lanka. Land routes to south India, however, developed after the Mauryas. These were mainly along the river valleys, the coasts, and often through mountain passes. Different parts of the country were now connected by trade routes, some leading to West and Central Asia. Taxila was connected by a highway with Kabul, from where roads went in different directions. The northern route passed through Bactria (north Afghanistan), the Oxus region, the Caspian Sea, and the Caucasus to the Black Sea. The southern route was from Kandahar and Herat to Ecbatana (later Hamadan in Persia); from there traders travelled overland to the eastern Mediterranean coast. A highway also ran from Kandahar to Persepolis and Susa in Persia. Ships travelling from the western ports followed the coastal route to Aden or Socotra; from there the voyage could be undertaken to the Red Sea. From somewhere near the modern Suez goods could be sent overland to Alexandria, which was an important trading centre of the Mediterranean world. According to a persistent view, a landmark in the development of communications was the 'discovery' of the monsoon winds by the Greek sailor Hippalus around AD 46-7, which made the mid-ocean navigation of the Arabian Sea

possible, reducing the distance between Indian and West Asian ports. But recent scholarship has treated this claim with increasing skepticism, and one scholar has gone to the extent of dismissing the 'discovery' theory as 'Roman ethnocentric nonsense'. The Greeks, in fact, knew of the monsoon 'independently of the mythical feat of Hippalus'. The army of Alexander had certainly experienced it and Nearchus, while bringing back his fleet, had to wait for the north-east monsoon before he could set sail. A critical scrutiny of the classical sources has shown that Hippalus is the name of the wind and not of its alleged discoverer. Nevertheless, it remains true that the earlier knowledge of the monsoons enabled Western sailors to give up coastal navigation in favour of crossing the high seas, thus opening up a route which, instead of going all around the southern coast of Arabia, came directly to the Gulf of Cambay or to the Deccan.

The influx of peoples from the north-west may have disrupted, for a while, some of the land routes connecting India with West and Central Asia. But they also gave an impetus to trade. The conquest of north-western India by the Indo-Greeks, Kushanas and the Shakas promoted closer contact with West and Central Asia. Through Central Asia passed the route (known as the Silk Route because much of the Chinese silk trade was carried through it) which connected China with the West Asian provinces of the Roman empire. Indian merchants participated as intermediaries in the Chinese silk trade. Central Asia, therefore, acted as a link between India and China. The merchants of north-western India mostly traded with these regions; those of western and southern India concentrated on southern Arabia, the Red Sea, and Alexandria, which handled the bulk of the Roman trade.

The emergence of the Roman empire as the dominant power in the Western world gave a fillip to India's trade from the first century BC onwards; the eastern part of the empire became the chief market of Indian luxury goods. *The Periplus of the Erythraen Sea*, written by an anonymous Greek navigator (first century AD), gives details of Indian exports to the Roman empire. The main exports were: pepper, pearls, ivory, silk, spikenard, malabathrum, diamonds, saffron, precious stones, and tortoise shell. Pepper was so important an export item that the early Tamil sources refer to it being exchanged for gold and Pliny mentions its price in *dinarii*. As a result of the Indian export of a variety of spices, especially pepper, Roman cuisine and gastronomy

underwent striking changes; this is evident from the celebrated Roman gourmet Apicius' cookbook of the first century. Indian spices, often used as cures in certain fields of medicine, influenced the development of Roman pharmacopeia. According to Pliny, pearls came into general use in Rome after the capture of Alexandria by Augustus. Roman women not only wore Indian pearls on their fingers and ears but also put them on their shoes. No less was the Roman demand for Indian muslin. Women decked out in seven folds of Indian muslin and paraded the streets of Rome. We are told they became a menace to the city's morals. Silk which was brought from China was also supplied by Indian merchants to the Roman empire. It was considered so precious that the Roman emperor Aurelian declared it to be worth its weight in gold. The frenetic pursuit of luxury in the Roman world aroused the indignation of a section of the ruling class and was a subject of animated debate in the Roman Senate. Pliny not only condemned 'the insatiable women's craving for luxuries' but also lamented that this led to a drain of 100 million sesterces of gold from Rome each year, half of it to India alone. Despite an element of exaggeration in Pliny's account, there is little doubt that the Romans sent to India a large quantity of gold and silver coins. No less than 129 finds of Roman coins have been reported so far in India, most of them from the peninsula.

In return for her exports India imported from the Roman empire such commodities as topaz, thin cloth, linen, antimony, glassware, copper, tin, lead, wine, realgar, orpiment, and wheat. The *Periplus* also tells us of the import of dainty damsels for purposes of concubinage in Indian royal establishments. The Roman world exported to India wine amphorae and red glazed Arretine ware, which have been found at Arikamedu (near Pondicherry) and several other places. An important pottery type called the Red Polished Ware found in western India is also believed to have Mediterranean origin. But it is likely that much of the ceramic types found in India were local imitations. The evidence from Ter and Kolhapur (Maharashtra) attests to the import of bronze objects from the West. Similarly, archaeology testifies to the import of Roman glass. The Romans also sent to India a large number of gold and silver coins which, as stated earlier, may have been the cause of Pliny's indignation. India was certainly a gainer in its trade with the West. But compared to the Roman or eastern Mediterranean objects

found in India, the tangible archaeological evidence of Indian commodities in the West is lacking. Ivory objects of Indian origin have been found in Afghanistan and further west. In Rome itself, however, nothing more than an ivory statuette from Pompeii has been found.

The list of commodities exchanged between India and the Mediterranean world is interesting. But not all Indian export items were available in sufficient quantity within the country to meet the Roman demand, the most important being spices. This scarcity inevitably encouraged trade between India, on the one hand, and Sri Lanka and South-East Asia, on the other. Ivory, tortoise shell, and other merchandise, Strabo (63 BC–AD 21) tells us, were brought in abundance to the Indian markets from Sri Lanka. Sandalwood was obtained from eastern Indonesia, cinnamon and cassia from mainland South-East Asia, and camphor from the Malay peninsula, Sumatra, and Borneo. All this implies that the commerce between India and South-East Asia supported trading activities in the western Indian Ocean.

Connected with the phenomenon of trade was the growth of a money economy in the early centuries before and after the Christian era. The imported coins were mostly used as bullion; they may have circulated only in large transactions, if at all. But evidence to prove the development of an indigenous currency is not wanting. In the north the Indo-Greeks issued a few gold coins; but the Kushanas minted gold coins in considerable numbers. For day-to-day transactions gold and silver coins could not serve as a medium of exchange; the Satavahanas, however, issued coins in metals of low value such as lead or potin. This indicates that the use of money became prevalent in the Deccan and the coastal areas. In north and north-western India the Kushanas minted copper coins in large numbers, which may have circulated in ordinary transactions. Copper coins were also issued by the Naga rulers and several other indigenous dynasties. No other period of ancient Indian history is known for so many varieties of coins as this period. This indicates that the money economy had penetrated deep into the economic life of the common people.

Trade and coinage were inextricably linked with the process of urbanization. *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* makes direct reference to quite a few coastal towns. Archaeological evidence, however,

indicates the existence of a large number of towns in different parts of the country. In the north-west Taxila was the most important urban centre; its peak of prosperity is very well documented for the period 200 BC–AD 200. In Jammu and Kashmir 23 sites with urban

Plate 8: Obverse and reverse of: (a) coin of Kshaharata Bhumaka from Mathura; (b) coin of Kaniska, son of Huvishka, found at Sonkh, Mathura; and (c) gold coin of Huvishka.

features have been explored; they all belong to the Kushana period. Numerous settlements were founded in the Panjab during this phase. In western Uttar Pradesh Mathura was the most prosperous city during the time of the Kushanas. In the middle Gangetic basin, Kaushambi, Varanasi, and Pataliputra occupied pride of place. In Bengal, Tamralipti (Tamluk) and Chandraketugarh remained important port towns until about the third century. In Rajasthan, Viratnagar (Bairat in Jaipur district) and Madhyamika (Nagari in Chittorgarh district) flourished in the early centuries of the Christian era. Tripuri and Eran in Madhya Pradesh, and Maheshwar-Navdatoli in Gujarat were centres of artisanal and trading activity during this period. Many sites excavated in Andhra Pradesh bear evidence of urban occupation during the Satavahana period; most of them participated in India's trade with the outside world. The most important among them were Dhulikatta (Karimnagar district), Yeleshwaram (Nalgonda district), Kondapur (Medak district), Dharnikota, Amaravati, and Nagarjunakonda (all in Guntur district). In Tamilnadu most urban sites are located in the plains, particularly in the coastal belt. Among them Arikamedu seems to have had the strongest Roman connection, though Kaveripattinam and Uraiyur, both situated in the Kaveri delta, were also important participants in contemporary commercial activities.

Increased commercial activity and the consequent growth of a money economy led to the proliferation of arts and crafts. According to the *Mahavastu*, a Buddhist work of about the second century, more than 36 kinds of workers lived in the town of Rajgir. The *Milindapanho* provides a list of 75 occupations, of which nearly 60 were connected with various kinds of crafts. The growth in arts and crafts led to greater specialization than ever before and consequently to the achievement of greater technical skill in certain spheres of production. Thus, we are told that out of the 75 occupations listed in the *Milindapanho* eight were connected with the working of such mineral products as gold, silver, lead, tin, copper, brass, iron, and precious stones or jewels. Iron working seems to have made considerable progress, for the *Periplus* refers to Indian iron and steel as imports into the Egyptian ports. The period witnessed progress in the techniques of textile manufacture. The *Milindapanho* states that Gotami, the aunt of the Buddha, adopted five processes for making cloth. Patanjali testifies to the special celebrity attained by Mathura in the manufacture

of textiles, especially *sataka*, a kind of cloth. The influx of Chinese silk into India stimulated the domestic silk industry. Thus, considerable technological advancement in different sectors of production may be postulated for the post-Maurya period.

The increase in trade demanded an efficient organization of production and distribution. Individual artisans congregated together and formed guilds; merchants also organized themselves into corporations. No less than two dozen guilds of artisans existed in this period. The guild system seems to have become the general pattern of production, facilitating high output. Inscriptions attest to the existence of many of them in the Mathura region, and the western Deccan, where Govardhana was an important centre of guilds of artisans. The guilds sometimes acted as trustees and bankers. A Satavahana record of the second century states that money (in silver *pana*) was deposited by lay devotees of the Buddha with potters, oil millers, and weavers for the purpose of providing robes and other necessities for monks. A contemporary record from Mathura refers to a chief who deposited money with a guild of flour-millers for the maintenance of a hundred brahmanas out of the interest on it. The guilds evidently utilized the capital deposited with them to augment production and paid interest on it out of the proceeds from the sale of their commodities. The possibility of increasing output may have prompted the guilds to hire additional labour, both free labour and slaves. This naturally gave a measure of freedom to artisans and craftsmen.

Presumably because of their wealth, the guilds emerged as an important factor in post-Maurya society. In several cities they seem to have issued coins, which was ordinarily done by sovereign powers. At least five pre-Indo-Greek coins issued by guilds have come to light in the Taxila excavations; they indicate that on the eve of the Greek occupation of Taxila a corporation of merchants carried on the administration of the city. The practice of issuing coins by merchant groups seems to have prevailed also in other towns such as Kaushambi, Tripuri (Tewar on the Narmada), Mahishmati (Mandhata), Vidisha (Madhya Pradesh), Eran (now a village in the Sagar district of Madhya Pradesh), Madhyamika (identified with Nagari near Chittor in Rajasthan), Varanasi, etc. Even when the Satavahanas and Kushanas established their kingdom in the first two centuries of the Christian

era, the rulers could not ignore the merchant guilds (*nigama sabha*) in the towns of the Deccan, though clear proof of their actual participation in administration is lacking.

Membership of a guild provided status and security to an artisan. The guilds fixed the rules of work, the standards of quality, and the price of the finished products. The behaviour of the guild members was controlled through a guild court. The customary usage of the guild had the force of law for its members. A married woman willing to join the Buddhist order had to seek the permission of not only her husband but also of the guild to which she belonged. Guild laws were protected by the state, as can be inferred from the lawbook of Manu. Guilds had their own insignia, banners, and seals, which gave them a public identity. The most effective method of self-advertisement employed by the professional guilds was to make liberal religious donations. Smiths, perfumers, weavers, goldsmiths, and even leather workers are said to have donated caves, pillars, tablets, cisterns, and other items to Buddhist establishments.

Artisans and craftsmen were largely drawn in the post-Maurya period from the shudras, who gained in wealth and status on account of the progress of crafts and commerce. With the disappearance of the Maurya state, which had regulated all economic activities, the guilds became powerful and perhaps secured a certain measure of independence for the artisans. But most artisans were confined to urban centres like Taxila and Mathura in the north and coastal towns and their hinterlands in the Deccan and the south. It is, therefore, difficult to postulate any major change in the living conditions of the class of the shudras. Generally they continued to be employed as hired labour and slaves. The lawgiver Manu laid down a number of laws which adversely affected their economic position; in his view the shudras were meant to serve the upper *varnas*. In cases of assault and similar crimes the punishments prescribed for them were very harsh. According to Manu, the very limb with which a man of a low caste hurt a member of the highest caste was to be cut off. If, for example, a shudra insulted a twice-born with gross invective, he would have his tongue cut off. Legally, a member of a higher *varna* could marry a woman of a lower order. But Patanjali tells us that the *dasi* (maid servant) and *vrishali* (shudra woman) were meant for the pleasures of men of the upper classes. Most shudras seethed in

discontent at this gross discrimination. It is not unlikely that they often turned against brahmanas and other higher castes and thus caused tension in society. Several early Puranic passages of the late third and early fourth century indicate that society was passing through a phase of crisis known as the Kaliyuga when the institutions of family, private property, and the *varna* system were under attack. Therefore, the lawgivers not only provided for a number of safeguards against the outbreak of shudra hostility but also for the protection of the Brahmanical patriarchal social institutions. They laid down inheritance rules which deprived women of their right to property and lowered the age of marriage, which took away their freedom to choose their husbands. As an unmarried girl a woman had to depend on her father, as a wife on her husband, and as a widow on her son. She was, according to Manu, a seductress.

The stringent legal injunctions laid down by Manu may be viewed as an effort to protect a traditional *varna* order now in close contact with alien peoples, often known in Indian sources as the Yavanas and whose settlements in north-western India had existed even in earlier times. The vast body of Kharoshthi inscriptions of the early Christian centuries found in this region do not mention the term Yavana, but many names occurring in them are certainly of Greek origin. Similarly, numerous Kushana finds, such as coins, terracottas, and sculptures, indicate that they came in considerable numbers. In western India, the high visibility of the Yavanas in the donative records at Karle makes their presence in the vicinity unquestionable. In south India also, most of the urban centres which prospered on foreign trade had by now considerable numbers of Yavanas. The Shangam poems make repeated references to them. In the city of Kaveripattanam (situated at the mouth of the river Kaveri), we are told, the onlooker's attention was caught by their residences. The presence in India of foreigners who achieved political and economic importance posed a threat to the caste system. Brahmana orthodoxy could not dub them as outcastes; on the contrary it had to come to terms with them, as is evident in the *Mahabharata*. At one place in this text they are described as the sons of Yayati and at another they are said to have sprung from the body of Vasishtha's cow together with the Pahlavas. In one passage the Yavanas are degraded as shudras and in another Indra says that they can be admitted into the Brahmanical order if they follow the

Brahmanical *dharma*. Mutually contradictory though these statements may appear, they are all indicative of efforts to assimilate them into Indian society. Shrewdly enough, the lawgiver Manu conferred the status of 'fallen kshatriyas' (*vratya kshatriya*) on them.

The absorption of foreigners into Indian society was made easier through the adoption of Buddhism, which did not raise difficulties about caste. This explains why a number of foreign rulers patronized the religion of the Buddha. The Indo-Greek Agathocles displayed Buddhist symbols on his coins, and so did Menander. Several individuals of Greek origin made gifts to Buddhist monks and their order. One Irila built two cisterns for monks at Junar; Chitta constructed a meeting hall for the Samgha at the same place. Indragnidatta excavated a cave at Nasik, and at least seven greeks donated pillars at Karle. The Kushanas, especially Kanishka, also made munificent donations to Buddhist establishments. In their time a number of missions were sent abroad, and Buddhism came into contact with foreign people. In the process of proselytising Buddhism received and absorbed new

Plate 9: Anathapindika's gift of Jetavana to Buddha showing the water vessel essential for pouring water to make the gift. Bharhut, central India, Sunga period, second century BC. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

ideas. This, however, was not true of the Brahmanical religion; the only important evidence of its following among non-Indians is perhaps the pillar inscription (*c.* 120-100 BC) of the Graeco-Bactrian king Antialkidas's ambassador Heliodorus at Vidisha.

Indigenous support for Buddhism came mainly from the mercantile community, which was by áll accounts prosperous. Many *stupas* and monasteries of this period owed their existence to the charity of merchants. Through trade Buddhism travelled to West and Central Asia, China, and South-East Asia. Within the country, most Buddhist cave monasteries were situated along trade routes running through the well-marked mountain passes of the Western Ghats. Evidently located at important stages on the journey, these abbeys served as resting places, supply houses, and banking houses for caravans of merchants.

As a result of lavish donations the Buddhist monasteries tended to become repositories of wealth. Some of the cells in the main body of the *vihara* at Karle and several other places in the Deccan have inner compartments without light or ventilation; these may have been used for the safekeeping of precious goods. Most of the outer cells had strong wooden doors which could be barred from within and locked from without. All this indicates the presence of substantial wealth in the monasteries. Some of the recorded gifts to Buddhist monasteries were made by monks and nuns. At Sanchi, for example, out of more than six hundred recorded donations they made two hundred. That they had the money to make donations shows that they flouted the earlier Buddhist canon, which required a new entrant into the order to give away all his or her possessions and then renounce worldly life. The reinterpretation of the doctrine of the Buddha was thus rendered inevitable when the renouncer became a parasite of the renounced.

Differences over what really constituted the teachings of the Buddha had begun soon after his death. Attempts had been made to maintain the unity of the order through a series of councils, though without much success. By the time of Kanishka as many as eighteen Buddhist sects are said to have come into being. According to tradition, during his time the fourth Buddhist council was held in Kashmir, where the first great schism of Buddhism was recognized. The more orthodox adherents of the religion claimed that theirs was the original teaching of the Buddha; they were called the Hinayana sect or the followers of

the Lesser Vehicle. In course of time Hinayana Buddhism became popular in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and the countries of South-East Asia. The Mahayanists (the followers of the Mahayana or the Greater Vehicle) dominated in India, Central Asia, Tibet, China, and Japan. One of the outstanding early exponents of Mahayanism was Nagarjuna, a convert from a northern Deccan brahmana family.

The hallmark of the Mahayana was the Bodhisattva doctrine, which was a logical development of the earlier Buddhist ideas. According to the older doctrine, the Bodhisattva lived in wisdom and love and wrought many deeds of kindness and mercy, and ultimately became the Buddha. Ordinary believers were, therefore, encouraged to emulate him and attain *nirvana*. But in the Mahayanist thought the Bodhisattva was one who worked selflessly for the good of all mankind and bided his time until all living beings could achieve the goal. The older Buddhism had regarded individual salvation as the goal; the new doctrine had as its objective the salvation of all beings.

The Bodhisattva was conceived as a previous incarnation of the Buddha; this led to the belief that one could accumulate spiritual merit through successive births. Logically enough, the Mahayana emphasized that merit was transferable from one person to another; numerous Buddhist dedicatory records indicate that this could be done through a pious act in the name of a person to whom merit was to be transferred.

The Bodhisattva of the Mahayana was not only a spirit of compassion but also of suffering, who redeemed humanity through his own suffering. A belief current in West Asia at that time was evidently borrowed by the Mahayana Buddhism: from the idea of the 'suffering saviour' was derived the concept of Maitreya Buddha, who would appear in future to redeem mankind. The Mahayana created in course of time a pantheon of noble and beneficient Bodhisattvas, who claimed the faith and allegiance of the devotees. The Buddha himself came to be increasingly looked upon as the earthly manifestation of a mighty spiritual being. He was elevated from the rank of a religious teacher to the status of a saviour god. The worship of the image of the Buddha with elaborate rituals, formulae, and charms soon took the place of the earlier simple faith in him—a development which the founder of the religion would have loathed. The earlier practice of worshipping the symbols of the Buddha continued, but

his image became increasingly common from around the turn of the Christian era. One of the earliest specimens of the Buddha image, conjecturally dated to the first century BC, comes from Mathura. The Buddha was transformed into a personal god, to whom his followers could pray for succour in distress. As a result, the doctrine of *bhakti* (loving devotion) evolved as a characteristic feature of the Mahayana Buddhism. Thus, the Buddhism that evolved after the meeting of the fourth Buddhist council was strikingly different from the original conception of its founder.

Like Buddhism, Jainism also did not remain unchanged. The religion suffered a split towards the end of the first century AD. The orthodox Jainas came to be known as the Digambaras (sky-clad) and the liberal ones as the Shvetambaras (white-clad). From Magadha the Jainas moved westwards to Mathura and then to Ujjain and finally settled in Saurashtra. They also migrated to Kalinga, where under Kharavela they enjoyed royal patronage for a while. Like Buddhism, Jainism also developed the practice of image worship. The Hathigumpha inscription refers to the removal of a Jina image from Kalinga to Pataliputra as early as the time of the Magadhan king Nanda and to its recovery by Kharavela (in the first century BC). Several well-carved Jaina images and votive tablets with Jina figures have been discovered at Mathura, but, on the whole, Jainism remained conservative.

The growing popularity of Buddhism and other heterodox sects went against the Vedic sacrifice and animal slaughter. The heretical attack on Vedic institutions and sacrifices seriously undermined the prestige and authority of the brahmanas, who therefore appropriated the popular cults with significant followings. In the process Brahmanical religion underwent important changes. Most of the Vedic gods passed into oblivion and their place was taken by a trinity of gods, with Brahma as the creator, Vishnu as the preserver, and Shiva as the destroyer of the evil-ridden world. In course of time Vishnu and Shiva emerged as the most important gods of the Brahmanical pantheon. Their devotees later constituted two separate sects.

Vishnu was thought of as the supreme god. After Brahma created the universe Vishnu, who had been sleeping in the primeval ocean on the thousand-headed snake Shesha, awoke to reign from the highest heaven Vaikuntha. From there he observes the world; when evil is rampant he appears in various incarnations (*avataras*) to save mankind.

Perhaps this idea was borrowed from the Bodhisattva doctrine of Buddhism. It may have evolved with the identification of Vishnu with Krishna, who is mentioned in the *Rigveda* as a demon and as an enemy of Indra. By the early centuries of the Christian era Krishna had become the incarnation of Vishnu and the fountainhead of all religious philosophy, goading Arjuna to fight against his Kuru cousins on the battlefield, and pulling strings offstage most of the time in the *Mahabharata*.

Shiva, mentioned by Megasthenes as Dionysus, evolved from the Rigvedic god Rudra and the Tamil god Murugan, though his Tamil antecedents are sometimes doubted. A number of non-Aryan fertility cults, such as those of the phallic emblem (*lingam*) and the bull (*nandi*), merged with the worship of Shiva. The earliest evidence of the phallic cult goes back to the much earlier period. It was incorporated into Brahmanism around the beginning of the Christian era, and Shiva has since been worshipped chiefly in the form of a *linga*. Yet Shiva is worshipped in human form as well. One of the earliest representations of him in human form comes from the village Gudimallam (in Andhra Pradesh), where a 1.5 m high and extremely realistic emblem bears upon it a malformed dwarf on whose shoulders stands the two-armed god, holding a ram in his right hand and a water vessel and battle axe in the left one, with his sex mark prominently shown through the diaphanous loin cloth.

Simultaneously with the emergence of these gods, Brahmanism was assimilating a variety of popular cults. Animals, trees, mountains, and rivers came to acquire divine associations. The cow tended to become an object of reverence in Brahmanical normative texts, though it was converted into a mark of 'Hindu' identity perhaps not before the colonial period. After the cow, the snake was the most revered animal; originally it was the centre of primitive fertility rites. The Vaikuntha mountain became sacred to Vishnu, as Kailasha was to Shiva. Vaikuntha, thought to be situated in the highest heavens, has not yet been identified; Kailasha is generally recognized as a peak in the central Himalayas. Tree cults were also absorbed into the Brahmanical faith. The *pipal* or *ashvattha* and the *vata* (banyan) were especially sacred trees. The *tulasi* or the holy basil plant was sacred to Vishnu. It is still grown in the courtyards of traditional Hindu homes; Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu, is still married every year at a fixed

date to the goddess Vrinda who is represented by this plant. The waters of the Ganga were held sacred; in the myths the river is said to have sprung from the foot of Vishnu and fallen to earth through the matted locks of Shiva. Most of the above-mentioned cults had roots in primitive popular beliefs and practices and have survived to our own day.

The Brahmanical religion, which evolved through a process of syncretism with popular cults, was based on the doctrine of *bhakti*. Borrowed from Buddhism, *bhakti* meant that a completely personal relationship between the god and his devotee was possible through devotion and not just by performing sacrifices. Devotion was to arise from unflinching faith; not surprisingly, Krishna, despite his rather questionable personal track record, was accepted as the incarnation of the supreme Vishnu. The concept of *bhakti* was first clearly expounded ostensibly by Krishna himself in the *Bhagavadgita*.

In spite of a gradual shift in emphasis from ritual to devotion as the means of attaining nearness to god, Vedic sacrifice was not entirely rejected. The people, however, were gradually losing touch with the Vedic tradition. The religious importance previously enjoyed by the Vedic texts now came to be attached to the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*

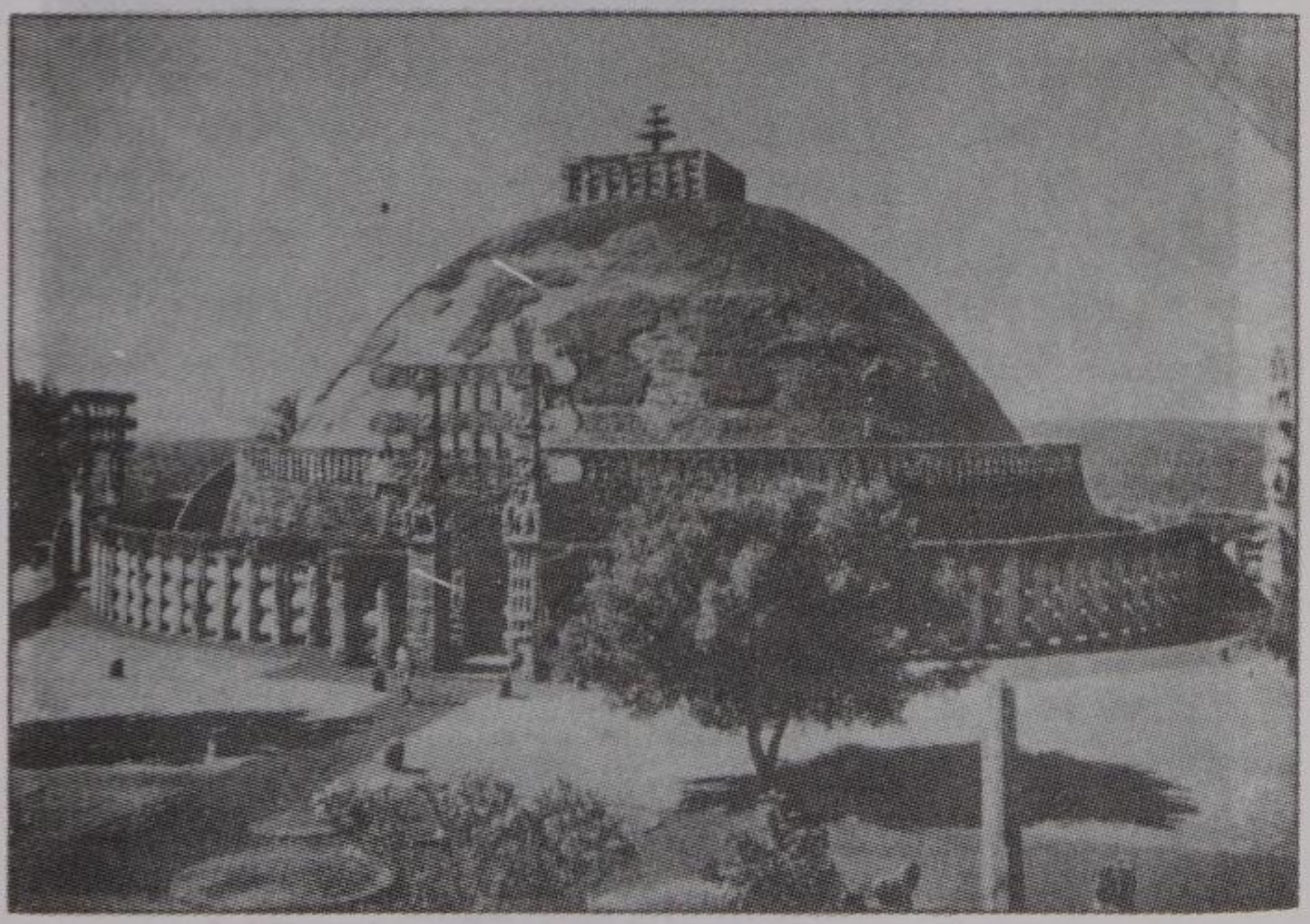

Plate 10: Stupa I (Great Stupa). Sanchi, Madhya Pradesh, *c.* third century BC through first century AD.

and the Puranas. The epics were bardic in origin and secular in character. They had, therefore, to be revised by the brahmanas so as to give them a religious character. The process took several centuries and resulted in substantial interpolations in their original kernel. The most important interpolation was the *Gita*, which has been dated around the second century BC. It contains 700 tightly woven stanzas, which provide the first clear exposition of the basic tenets of the Vaishnava faith. No wonder the *Gita* later became the basic text of the Vaishnavas. In our own times it is talked about more often than read, its glaring contradictions and poetic excellence and its justification of a fratricidal war being conveniently ignored by those who tirelessly swear by it.

The Brahmanical religion was still in its formative stage. Art, therefore, centred around Buddhism. Rich merchants, guilds, and kings spent much wealth on it. The artistic remains of the period

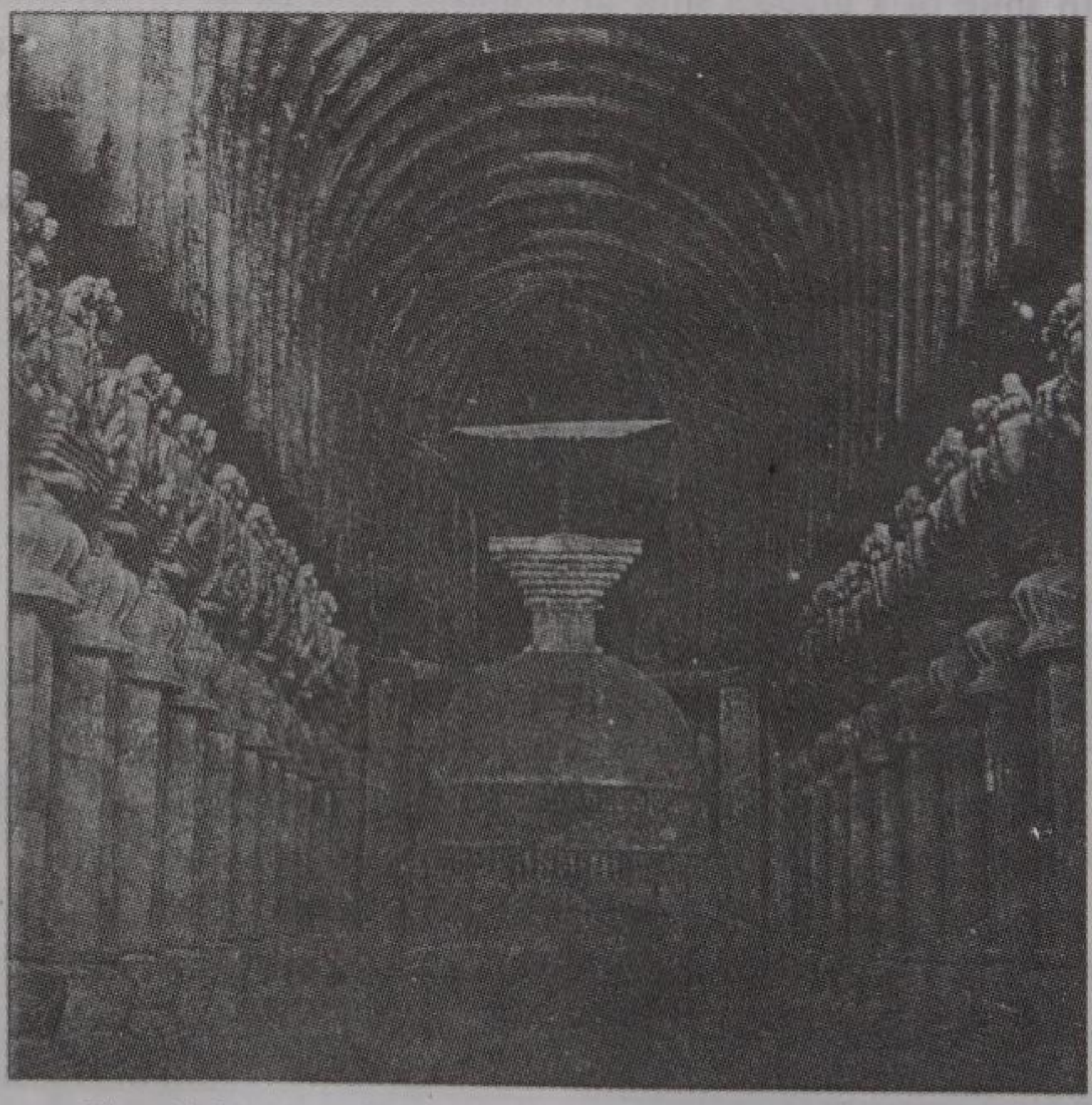

Plate 11: Interior of Chaitya hall. Karle, Maharashtra. Kshaharata, Shaka period, *c.* AD 120.

consist chiefly of Buddhist *stupas* and cave temples. The *stupa* began as a pre-Buddhist burial mound, though by the time of Ashoka Buddhism had taken up the cult of the *stupa*. It was a hemispherical dome built over the relics of the Buddha or a sanctified monk or a sacred text. The relic was placed in a central chamber at the base of the *stupa*, which was surrounded by a path and enclosed by railings. Of the surviving *stupa* railings the earliest comes from Bharhut and dates to the second century BC. At about the same time the older Sanchi *stupa* was renovated and enlarged to twice its original size. The *stupa* of Amaravati, larger and more ornate than the one at Sanchi, seems to have been completed by about the second century AD.

The chief archaeological remains of the period, other than the *stupas* and their surrounding gateways and railings, consist of cave

Plate 12: Female terracotta figure. From Tamluk, West Bengal, Sunga period, *c.* second-first century BC. Ht: 21 cm. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

temples whose beginnings may be ascribed to the reign of Ashoka. Dug in hill-sides, the caves were used as shrines, temples, or dwellings by the monks. In the western Deccan, under the Satavahanas and their successors, the largest and the most famous of artificial caves were excavated, the oldest in the area being at Bhaja near Pune. Roughly contemporaneous with the Bhaja caves may be a part of the group of early Buddhist caves at Pitalkhora. The structure at Karle, dating probably to the early second century AD, is the finest example of the more elaborate and ornate cave architecture. The Karle cave has a rectangular entrance leading into a *chaitya* hall (meeting hall of Buddhist monks and lay worshippers), which is also rectangular. This is cut about 37 m deep into the solid rock, with an apse at one end containing a miniature *stupa;* its width is 14 m. Its ceiling rises 13 m. above the floor and has rock-cut ribs, which were an imitation of the

Plate 13: Life events of Shakyamuni Buddha. Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh, Satavahana period, *c.* second century. White marble. Ht: 160 cm. British Museum, London.

barrel-vaulting of a wooden building. The rock-cut sanctuaries grew in size and splendour over time, as can be seen at Ajanta and Ellora (both near Aurangabad in Maharashtra), where some of the caves belong to this period. The only surviving examples of wall paintings from this period are found at Ajanta in a rock-cut *chaitya* hall, which goes back to the second or the first century BC. The Jainas also had their cave temples, notable among them being those at the Udayagiri/ Khandagiri hills near Bhuvaneswar in Orissa. They were, however, not as elaborate as those of the Buddhists.

Sculpture functioned mainly as ornamentation of the gateways and railing of the great Buddhist sites at Bharhut, Gaya, and Sanchi. Sculptural remains at these places represent different stages in the evolution of art; those at Sanchi, perhaps the latest in the series, show the highest degree of excellence in contrast to the Bharhut specimens

Plate 14: Kanishka. Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, Kushan period, reign of Kanishka or later *c.* second century. Reddish sandstone. Ht: 170 cm. Mathura Museum, Mathura.

Plate 15: Woman with a bird-cage. From a railing pillar, Bhutesar, Mathura, Kushan period, second century AD. Red sandstone. Ht: 129 cm. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

Plate 16: The courtesan in Vesavasa intoxicated in her garden. From Mathura. Kushan, second century.

Plate 17: Vedika pillar with Greek warrior. Bharhut, Madhya Pradesh, Sunga period, *c.* 100–80 BC. Reddish brown sandstone. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

which are archaic and uncertain in their treatment of the theme. The northern and mid-Indian plastic tradition was carried to Amaravati and the Deccan caves, where considerable mastery of sculpture was achieved by about the second century AD. The devotees of Jainism patronized a school of sculpture at Mathura; here at an early period the artists working for centuries in the white-spotted red sandstone of the locality, produced votive plaques depicting the cross-legged naked figure of a Tirthankara in meditation. The Mathura school; as

Plate 18: Standing Buddha. From Bactro-Gandhara region. Pakistan, Kushana period. Ht: 150 cm. approx., Lahore Museum, Lahore.

Plate 19: Bodhisattva, Gandhara, second century, Chandigarh Museum.

it came to be known, is said to have begun at the end of the first century BC. Later it received the patronage of the Kushana kings, some of whose portrait statues have also been discovered near Mathura, the most well known being a statue of Kanishka of which only the headless trunk has survived. Mathura produced the first image of the Buddha, his presence in the earlier *stupas* being indicated by symbols—the city had not yet become the home town of the many-faceted Krishna whose earliest artistic portrayal (belonging to around the fifth century) is found at a place called Arra near Varanasi. In technique and artistic execution the Mathura craftsmen owed a great deal to the earlier Indian tradition. But they also borrowed more than one Graeco-Roman motif from Gandhara in the north-west, where a distinct and prolific school of art flourished from about the middle of the first century BC to the fifth century AD. The Mathura tradition inspired another school of art, that of Sarnath, in the succeeding period.

The Gandhara school, often called Graeco-Buddhist, was influenced less by Greek than by Roman art. It enjoyed its period of greatest prosperity under the Kushana emperors. The subject-matter of Gandhara art was predominantly Buddhist, but many of the sculptural motifs are of Hellenistic or Roman derivation. The mother of the Buddha resembled the Athenian matron. Many early Gandhara Buddhas have Apollonian faces, their draperies arranged in the style of a Roman *toga*. Stucco (lime-plaster) for sculpture was in use in the Gandhara region as early as the first century AD. By the third century it had largely replaced stone as the material for the decoration of *stupas* and *viharas*.

Though lacking in the dignity and finesse of a major art form such as sculpture, terracotta was a commonly and popularly used medium of artistic expression. From the period of the Shungas and Kanvas a large number of terracotta female figures have survived. Richly dressed and slim, these figures have heavy countenances, and well-toned bodies. Some finds exhibit a great variety of ethnic tribal and nomad fashions, especially prominent in the male figures from Mathura and betray a marked Shaka-Kushana impress. This was most probably the result of the influx of the peoples who came to India in the post-Maurya period with new fashions and tastes. To the south of the Vindhyas rich terracotta material has come to light at Maski in Andhra Pradesh. The large-scale production of terracottas has been

linked with the rise of urban centres during this period. But it is difficult to question their association with folk traditions and their value as sources of styles appearing in stone sculptures 'seemingly without precedent'.

Literary activity at the turn of the Christian era took various forms. The *Gathasaptashati*, an anthology of 700 self-contained graceful stanzas on varying forms of love in a rural setting, is the finest output in Prakrit. It is said to have been written by the Satavahana king Hala, a rather shadowy figure, though additions continued to be made to it up to the sixth century. Several Buddhist texts dealing with the life of the Buddha give ample proof of the intermixture of Prakrit and Sanskrit. In spite of this hybridization, Sanskrit emerged as the chief medium of literary expression of all kinds. Around the middle of the second century BC Patanjali wrote the *Mahabhashya*, a commentary on the earliest extant Sanskrit grammar of Panini. Patanjali formulated certain new grammatical rules (*ishtis*) to supplement the earlier ones; this would mean that Sanskrit had by now undergone changes. Medical treatises were written, the most famous being that of Charaka, a contemporary of Kanishka. Another work of this class, attributed to Sushruta, belongs to a slightly later date. The science of medicine benefited much from India's contacts with the Western world, and so did astronomy. Several legal texts were compiled in this period. The *Manusmriti*, which has remained the most influential instrument of Brahmanical ideology in Indian society, belongs to the period 200 BC–AD 200. It was during this period that the brahmanas began to redact the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* and the Puranas, which contain much legal lore. Hundreds of verses are common to the *Manusmriti* and the *Mahabharata*. The *Natyashastra*, attributed to the sage Bharata, is the first important work on drama, music, and dance; according to some scholars, it was composed during the early centuries of the Christian era. The earliest surviving Sanskrit poetry in a classical style is that of the Buddhist Ashvaghosha, a contemporary of Kanishka. He wrote a poem on the life of the Buddha, the *Buddhacharita*, which has come down to us with later interpolations. Another poetical composition by him, the *Saundarananda*, deals with the conversion of the Buddha's half brother to Buddhism. Ashvaghosha was also the first playwright in Sanskrit. His drama survives in fragments discovered in a monastery in Turfan (Central Asia). But the oldest

complete plays that have survived are those written by Bhasa. The finest of his thirteen plays (discovered in Kerala in 1912) is the *Svapanavasavadattam*, its theme drawn from the ancient Udayan romance.

Ashvaghosha and Bhasa wrote in an ornate style perhaps for courtly circles. From now on Sanskrit tended to be ostentatious, simple words giving way to compounded ones. Already a virtual monopoly of the brahmanas, Sanskrit was now gradually becoming the language of the ruling class. Even royal inscriptions came to be written in classical ornate style; the earliest of them in classical Sanskrit belongs to the Shaka king Rudradaman (dated AD 150), who takes pride in his mastery over the language. Later it came to be increasingly adopted in royal charters. Prakrit, the language close to popular speech and used by the Maurya and Satavahana rulers, was thus replaced by Sanskrit, though in northern Tamilnadu and adjoining areas the early Pallava rulers issued their copper-plate charters in Prakrit during the third and fourth centuries; the distinct Tamil linguistic tradition was still to take its form and was not yet in a position to become a substitute for the north Indian literary idiom.

In Tamilnadu more than eighty short inscriptions in the Brahmi script, which are found in the Jaina and Buddhist caves in the Madurai region, provide the earliest evidence of writing and contain several examples of Tamil adaptations of Sanskrit and Pali or Prakrit terms. These inscriptions belong to the period *c.* 200 BC–AD 300, which coincides with the initial phase of the growth of the earliest Tamil literature called the Shangam literature. This literature grew independently of the Sanskrit literary tradition. But its development was not in total isolation; for some of the poets were brahmanas through whom Sanskritic ideas entered Tamil literature. According to tradition, many centuries ago three successive assemblies (Shangams) were held at the Pandyan capital Madurai. At these assemblies, lasting for 9,990 years, gathered all the poets and bards, whose compositions constituted the Shangam literature. But the predominantly folk character of the Shangam poems indicates that bards who roamed about singing the praise of their patron chieftains produced most of them; scholarly poets who followed the bardic tradition composed only some. Kapilar, Paranar, Avvayar, and Gautamanar were well-known scholarly poets (*pulavar*) as distinct from the common bards

(*panar*). Tamil bardic poetry and other Shangam works were already in existence as a floating mass of folk literature in this period and the assemblies of poets and scholars—if such assemblies were ever convened—possibly redacted it as classified anthologies. Of the whole corpus of early Tamil literature, the *Ettutogai* (*Eight Anthologies*) and the *Pattupattu* (*Ten Idylls*) are the most archaic, though the terminal date of their anthologization may be placed somewhere around the third century AD. The compilation of the earliest work dealing with Tamil grammar and poetics, the *Tolkappiyam,* also cannot be pushed back further than this, though some portions of it may belong to a slightly earlier period. The *Patinenkizkanakku*, the 18 didactic texts including the famous *Tirukkural* by Tiruvalluvar, have been assigned to a period later than the third century AD. The twin Tamil epics *Silapadikaram* and *Manimekalai*, which do not strictly belong to the group of works of the Shangam but are often associated with it by some scholars, cannot be dated earlier than the sixth century AD. Disputes about the stratification of the Shangam texts may remain unresolved for many years to come. However, what is difficult to question is that compared with classical Sanskrit literature, the early Tamil literature was closer to the realities of life.

CHAPTER 8

Feudal Beginnings in the 'Golden Age'

The eclipse of the Kushanas in north India and of the Satavahanas in the Deccan in the third century ushered in a period of political disintegration and paved the way for the emergence of several minor powers and new ruling families. It was in this situation that the Guptas laid the foundation of an empire. Their origin and original home cannot be determined with certainty. But it is likely that they began their career as subordinates of one of the branches of the later Kushanas and acquired political control in the region of Magadha in the second decade of the fourth century. The first two Guptas, Shrigupta and Ghatotkacha, were rulers of no consequence and are known only through respectful mention by Chandragupta I, the real founder of the Gupta line. By marrying a Lichchhavi princess Chandragupta I sought to gain in prestige, though Vaishali does not appear to have been a part of his kingdom. His rule remained confined to Magadha and parts of eastern Uttar Pradesh (Saketa and Prayaga). He took the title of *maharajadhiraja*, and his accession in about AD 319-20 marks the beginning of the Gupta era.

Chandragupta I was succeeded by his son Samudragupta, probably in 325. Samudragupta became the ruler after subduing his rival Kacha, an obscure prince of the dynasty. His conquests are known from a lengthy eulogy (*prashasti*) composed by his court poet Harishena and engraved on an Ashokan pillar at Allahabad. This panegyric in elegant Sanskrit trumpets, even if posthumously, the triumphs of Samudragupta. It informs us that he uprooted Achyuta of Ahichchhatra, Nagasena of Padmavati (Padam Pawaya in Madhya Pradesh), and Ganapatinaga of Mathura; he also captured a prince of the Kota family (Bulandshahr area). This is followed by an impressive list of kings and tribes who were conquered and brought under various degrees of subjugation. Also, twelve kings of Dakshinapatha are said to have been captured and then liberated and reinstated. Further, eight kings of Aryavarta

(northern India) are described as having been 'violently exterminated'. The forest states (*atavirajyas*) of central India and the Deccan, chiefs of the five border states, and nine tribal principalities in Rajasthan were forced to pay tribute and taxes to Samudragupta and obey his orders. Foreign kings, such as the Daivaputra Shahanushahi (descendant of the 'Son of Heaven, King of Kings', indicating a Kushana title), the Shakas, and the ruler of Sri Lanka are referred to in the Allahabad inscription as paying tribute.

The states that are said to have succumbed to the power of Samudragupta make a fairly long list and would cover a large part of the subcontinent. But it is generally believed that Samudragupta exercised direct administrative control only over northern India. The kings of the Deccan and the south merely paid him homage; the Shakas in western India seem to have remained unconquered. Samudragupta did not directly administer the tribal 'republican' states of Rajasthan and the Panjab, though he certainly and finally broke their power. His claim to have subjugated the Kushanas has been questioned, though their power was surely on the wane. A Chinese source tells us that king Meghavarna of Sri Lanka (AD 352-79) sent presents to the emperor and sought his permission to build a monastery at Gaya. This hardly justifies the tributary status of the Sri Lankan king. At any rate, Samudragupta did carve out an empire, and celebrated his conquests by performing a horse sacrifice (*ashvamedha*).

It appears from the Allahabad panegyric that Samudragupta was not only a conqueror but also a poet, musician, and patron of learning. His poetical compositions have not survived, but his love of music is attested to by his gold coins which represent him as playing the *vina*. It has been suggested that he was the patron of the great Buddhist scholar Vasubandhu, though some scholars doubt this.

The empire of Samudragupta was further extended and consolidated by Chandragupta II, who ruled from AD 375 to 415. The *Devichandra-guptam* of Vishakhadatta tells us that Ramagupta succeeded Samudra-gupta. He was defeated by the Shakas to whom he agreed to surrender his wife Dhruvadevi. His younger brother Chandra protested against this and went to the Shaka king. This led to an estrangement between the two brothers. Eventually Chandragupta killed his elder brother and married his widow Dhruvadevi. Coins of Ramagupta have been found near Bhilsa in Madhya Pradesh, and some inscriptions prove

that the wife of Chandragupta was Dhruvadevi. This lends credence to the incident described in the *Devichandraguptam*.

Chandragupta II's campaign against the Shakas resulted in their final defeat and the annexation of western India to the Gupta empire. The western boundaries of the empire became secure for some time, and the Guptas gained control over the ports of western India. Chandragupta II entered into matrimonial alliances with a number of royal dynasties. He married Kuvernaga of the Naga family and had a daughter by her named Prabhavatigupta. She was given in marriage to Rudrasena II of the Vakataka dynasty, which ruled over what was previously the stronghold of the Satavahanas in central India. After the death of her husband she ruled as regent from AD 390 to 410. The Vakataka kingdom thus became virtually a part of the Gupta dominions. It is likely that the Kadamba ruler Kakutsthavarman, ruling over the Kuntala region (Konkan), gave his daughters in marriage to the Guptas. Chandragupta II took the title of Vikramaditya or the Sun of Prowess. His reign is often remembered not for wars but for his patronage of art and literature. Kalidasa, the great Sanskrit poet and playwright, is said to have lived in his court.

Kumaragupta (415-54) succeeded his father Chandragupta II. A branch of the Hunas from Central Asia had occupied Bactria, and was threatening to cross the Hindukush mountains. But they remained a distant threat during his rule. On the whole Kumaragupta's reign remained peaceful.

The Huna threat materialized in the reign of Kumaragupta's successors, to whom fell the real task of defending the empire. Skandagupta fought them bravely but the situation became complicated owing to several domestic problems. His feudatories seem to have asserted themselves, and his debased coins indicate a deep economic crisis in the empire. But he rallied his forces against the Hunas and appears to have won the battle.

The death of Skandagupta in about 467 was followed by a succession of several kings who could not keep the empire intact. A major blow to Gupta power came towards the end of the fifth century, when the Hunas entered north India in large numbers. Excellent archers and skilful horsemen familiar with metal stirrups, the Hunas hastened the disintegration of the empire, and within the next half century it gave way to a number of kingdoms.

The dissolution of the tottering Gupta empire coincides with the establishment of the Huna kingdom in north India as far as Eran in Madhya Pradesh. The first important Huna king was Toramana; a colossal representation of Varaha, the boar incarnation of Vishnu, shown as a four-legged theriomorph dated in his first regnal year, is found at Eran. He is said to have been converted to Jainism. In AD 515 he was succeeded by his son Mihirakula, who ruled from Sakala (Sialkot). Tradition speaks of him as a tyrant, an iconoclast, and a persecutor of the Buddhists, but he was also a devout Shaiva who founded the temple of Mihireshvara. Mihirakula was defeated by Yashodharman of Malwa and by Narasimhagupta Baladitya of the Gupta dynasty in succession. But the collapse of the Huna power did not lead to the revival of the empire of the Guptas.

The disintegration of Gupta power cannot be fully explained by the Huna invasion. Perhaps it was the inevitable result of the manner in which the empire was organized. Unlike the Mauryas, the Guptas adopted such pompous titles as *maharajadhiraja, parameshvara, paramabhattaraka, paramadvaita*, and *chakravarti*, which imply the existence of lesser kings with considerable authority within the empire. The major part of the territory conquered by the Guptas was ruled by such feudatories as the Parivrajaka and Uchchhakalpa princes in central India and many others subdued by Samudragupta. Only Bengal, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh, which formed the nucleus of the empire, were directly under imperial rule. The leading feudatories of the Gupta emperors were the Maitrakas of Valabhi, the Vardhanas of Thaneswar, the Maukharis of Kanauj, the Later Guptas of Magadha, and the Chandras of Bengal. As soon as the opportunity presented itself, they asserted their independence, reducing the empire to a mere shadow.

In contrast to the Mauryas, the Guptas do not seem to have possessed a large professional army. The record, which glorifies Samudragupta for his all-round conquests, does not tell us anything about his military apparatus. Nor does the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Fa-Hsien indicate the numerical strength of the Gupta army, though he visited the country during the reign of Chandragupta II. Probably troops supplied by the feudatories constituted the major portion of Gupta military strength. Also, the Guptas did not enjoy a monopoly of elephants and horses, essential components of an ancient military

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SCALE 500 km. / 300 miles

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machinery. All this led to the increasing dependence on feudatories, who wielded considerable authority at least on the fringes of the empire.

The Guptas did not possess an elaborate and organized bureaucracy either. The cadre which supplied superior officers was that of the *kumaramatyas*. It was from among them that such important officers as the *mantri* (minister), *senapati* (military commander), *mahadandanayaka* (minister of justice), and *sandhivigrahika* (minister of war and peace) were recruited. High-ranking officers were often appointed by the king. But several offices were often combined in the hands of the same person. Harishena, the composer of the Allahabad panegyric of Samudragupta, held several important portfolios. Administrative posts also tended to become hereditary, which led to the weakening of the royal control over administration.

Decentralization of administrative authority was caused by an increase in the granting of land and villages to priests and temples, which had begun in the Satavahana period and which gained in strength during the rule of the Vakatakas, though their overlords, the Guptas, have very few such grants to their credit. The beginning of the practice of making religious grants roughly synchronizes with the date of the earliest epic and Puranic descriptions of the Kaliyuga or the age of social crisis marked, among other things, by a sharp antagonism between the higher and the lower *varnas* resulting in the refusal of the shudras to perform their producing functions and of the vaishyas to pay taxes. In such a situation, the state gave up the earlier practice of collecting taxes directly through its agents and paying its priestly, military, and other employees for their services. It was now found mere convenient to assign revenues directly to those who needed to be paid by the state for their services.

Grants of land were made to priests and temples, and later to royal officers, along with fiscal and administrative immunities which undermined the authority of the state. The fiscal concessions accompanying the land grants included the royal right over salt and mines, which were royal monopolies in the Maurya period and evidently signs of sovereignty. Now villages were granted in perpetuity to the beneficiaries, often with administrative rights. In gift villages the inhabitants, cultivators and artisans included, were often asked by their rulers not only to pay customary taxes to the donees but also to

obey their commands; many records from central India prove this. The recipients of land grants in north India were empowered to punish thieves and other criminals; in central and western India from the fifth century onwards they were also given the right to try civil cases. The transfer of magisterial and police powers together with fiscal rights to the donees not only weakened the royal authority but also led to the oppression of peasants and inhabitants of the gift villages who were asked to obey their new masters and carry out their orders.

The land grants paved the way for the growth of feudal society. Several inscriptions indicate the emergence of serfdom, which meant that the peasants were attached to their land even when it was given away. Perhaps this began in south India in the earlier period because a third-century Pallava inscription informs us that four sharecroppers remained attached to the plot which was given to brahmanas. According to Fa-hsien, monasteries built for monks were furnished with houses, gardens, and fields, and with husbandmen and cattle to cultivate them. This is not corroborated by epigraphic evidence from north India. But in Gujarat, central India, and Orissa inscriptions from the sixth century indicate that the peasants were often required to remain on their land even when it was granted to others, though the practice of transferring peasants along with the land came into much wider vogue in the second half of the first millennium AD, and restricted the mobility of independent peasants, reducing them to the position of serfs or semi-serfs.

The beginning of serfdom and the consequent immobility of peasants in the Gupta period seem to have coincided with a gradual weakening of the institution of slavery; for the land charters of the Gupta period do not speak of slaves being engaged in economic production. Although the lawgiver Narada mentions fifteen kinds of slaves, they were mostly domestic servants employed in such work as sweeping the gateway, the privy, and the road; removing the leavings of food, ordure, and wine; and rubbing the master's limbs or shampooing the private parts of his body. Those engaged in agricultural activities are described by Narada as doing pure work and are not included in the category of slaves. The institution of slavery tended to become weak, though this did not mean any relief in the suffering of the peasantry.

The recipients of donations of land and village enjoyed the right of subinfeudation which eroded the rights of the peasantry. They were often authorized 'to enjoy the land, to get it enjoyed, to cultivate it or get it cultivated'. The donated land could thus be assigned to tenants on certain terms. This implied the donees' right to evict tenants from their land. The practice of subinfeudation, therefore, reduced permanent tenants to the position of tenants-at-will.

The imposition of forced labour (*vishti*) and several new levies and taxes from the Gupta period onwards further undermined the position of peasants. In the Maurya period slaves and hired labourers were subjected to forced labour; this was supervised by an officer and paid for. But from the Gupta period onwards it was extended to all classes of subjects, and came to include all kinds of work. The *Kamasutra* of Vatsyayana informs us that peasant women were forced to perform unpaid work of various kinds, such as filling the granaries of the village headman, moving things in and out of the house, cleaning the house, working in the fields, purchasing cotton, wood, flax, hemp, and thread and the sale, purchase, and exchange of various articles. It is known from contemporary inscriptions, especially those of the Vakatakas, that villagers were forced to contribute money and provisions to royal troops and officials when they halted at or passed through the village. The residents were required to supply flowers and milk to them. Cattle were also furnished for transport. Apart from these contributions, several new taxes came to be collected from the villagers. All this no doubt increased the burden of taxation on the peasantry. Forced labour, taxes, and other dues became all the more oppressive when the donees were given the right to collect them; unlike the Maurya royal officers who collected dues from the peasants on behalf of the state, the recipients of land grants now developed hereditary vested interests in the exploitation of the resources of the village. The practice of making land grants thus gave rise to feudal agrarian relations and forms of exploitation which generated social tension of which we have considerable evidence in later times. But at the same time it led to agrarian expansion in the peripheral and backward areas where donations of land were often made and where brahmana beneficiaries carried their advanced agricultural knowledge. The extension of agriculture helped the process of the formation of new states by providing a stable agrarian base from the late Gupta

Plate 20: Gupta Coins with Brahmi script.

period, when trade ceased to play a major role in socio-political transformation.

The decline of long distance trade seems to have set in from the Gupta period onwards. The inflow of Roman coins stopped after the early Christian centuries and the Roman empire itself broke up a little later. Trade with the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) empire continued until about the middle of the sixth century. Around this time the Byzantines learned from the Chinese the art of cultivating silk worms. This adversely affected India's commercial contacts with the West. Not surprisingly a guild of silk weavers migrated from their original home in Gujarat to Dashapura (Mandasor in Madhya Pradesh) where they gave up their original profession and took to other occupations. There are indications that the coastal areas of India carried on trade with South-East Asia. But this had little impact on the internal economy of the country.

With the decline in long distance trade linkages between coastal towns and their hinterland became feeble. Commodity production tended to shrink. With the trading activity becoming sluggish, the movement of artisans and traders from one part of the country to the other became redundant. Immobile artisans, therefore, remained attached to villages and in course of time, like the peasants, they were also transferred to the donees. Arts and crafts were thus ruralized, though the fourth-century rustless iron pillar at Mehrauli (Delhi) bears testimony to the technological skill of craftsmen, and inscriptions indicate that guilds of artisans and merchants played an important role in the municipal administration of some towns in the Gupta period.

Declining trade explains the relative paucity of metal money from the Gupta period onwards. The Guptas issued the largest number of gold coins in ancient India, some of them excellent specimens of craftsmanship. But these could be used only in heavy economic transactions like the sale and purchase of land of which evidence is available from Bengal; these could have hardly flowed into day-to-day retailing. Copper and silver coins of the period are few. Fa-hsien tells us that *cowries* became the common medium of exchange.

The slump in trade and the general decline in crafts and commodity production led to the decay of many towns in the third and fourth centuries. In north India many urban settlements of the Kushana

period like Kaushambi (Allahabad), Hastinapur, Purana Qila (Delhi), Ahichchhatra, and Taxila show signs of decay. Ayodhya and Mathura, which were flourishing towns in the early Christian centuries, lost their importance in the Gupta period, though this loss was more than made up much later by their association with Rama and Krishna respectively. Many towns in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Gujarat (Noh, Ujjain, Nagar, etc.) seem to have declined. This is also true of most of the Satavahana urban centres, like Kaundinyapura, Paithan, and Nasik (Maharashtra), Amaravati and Dharnikota (Andhra Pradesh), Vadgaon-Madhavpur, Brahmagiri, and Chandravalli (Karnataka). In the far south Arikamedu was the most important town which ceased to be economically active after the third century. In the heartland of the Gupta empire evidence of urban decay can be seen at many places. At Vaishali (Basarh, Muzaffarpur district in Bihar) the Gupta structures are less impressive than those of the earlier period. So is the case with Pataliputra (Patna). Excavations have shown no habitation at Sohagaura (Gorakhpur district), where two granaries are said to have existed in the Maurya period. Though an administrative centre of some importance, Varanasi also shows symptoms of decline during the Gupta period.

Obviously urban centres did not disappear altogether in the Gupta period, and prosperous town dwellers living in comfort and ease were not entirely absent. The *Kamasutra* describes the life of a well-to-do citizen as one devoted to the pleasures and refinements of life. Gatherings were held where poetic recitations and music were heard. The young man had to be trained in the art of love. The courtesan was not looked down upon. She was a normal feature of city life. Kalidasa refers to the amorous sports of young gallants with the harlots of Vidisha. According to the *Mudrarakshasa* of Vishakhadatta, prostitutes crowded the streets of the capital on festive occasions. The Dharmashastra writers, no doubt, displayed an unkindly attitude to public women, but, ironically enough, they came to be increasingly associated with the gods in later times. Kalidasa speaks of girls kept at the Mahakala temple at Ujjain, though the earliest evidence of temple prostitution is found in a cave inscription at Ramgarh (256 km south of Banaras) carved perhaps not long after Ashoka.

The status of women continued to decline. In the Gupta period certain features emerged which became characteristic of their position

in subsequent times. Women were not entitled to formal education, though, like the shudras, they were also allowed to listen to the epics and the Puranas. Reference to women teachers, philosophers, and doctors are available in early Indian literature, but they are few. Lawgivers almost unanimously advocated early marriage for girls; some of them even preferred pre-puberty marriage. Celibacy was to be strictly observed by widows. The practice of women following their husbands to the funeral pyre (*sati*) gained the approval of the jurists, even if it remained confined to the upper classes. The first memorial of a *sati*, found at Eran in Madhya Pradesh, is dated AD 510, though substantial evidence of it comes from the later period. Women were denied any right to property except for *stridhana* in the form of jewellery and garments. Their perpetual tutelage was argued forcefully. The social philosophy demanding the increasing subjugation of women was a natural development in a patriarchal class-divided society based on developed notions of private property, and a very small number of them may have had the option of becoming nuns and courtesans, or joining troupes of performers.

The social structure was undergoing changes in the Gupta period. Pronounced *varna* distinctions in various spheres of life can be seen in the contemporary writings. According to Varahmihira, a brahmana should have a house with five rooms, a kshatriya with four, a vaishya with three, and a shudra with two. He adds that in each case the length and breadth of the main room should vary in accordance with the order of superiority. The old provision allowing for different rates of interest for different castes continued in Gupta times. A Puranic text compiled in Gupta times associates the four colours, white, red, yellow, and black, with brahmana, kshatriya, vaishya, and shudra respectively. This shows the relative status of the four orders. The writings of the period emphasize that a brahmana should not accept food from a shudra because it reduces his spiritual strength. *Varna* distinctions were also observed in legal matters. The law books lay down that a brahmana should be tested by a balance, a kshatriya by fire, a vaishya by water, and a shudra by poison. In lawsuits requiring the deposit of sureties distinction between the twice-born and the shudras was made. Equally discriminatory were inheritance rules. A shudra son of a person belonging to a higher caste would get the smallest share. According to the lawgiver Brihaspati, the son of a

brahmana male and a shudra female was not entitled to any share in landed property. He also tells us that witnesses should belong to respectable families. Other legal texts state that shudras could appear as witnesses only on behalf of the members of their own caste. All this proves the class bias of law and justice, which tended to become increasingly prominent in course of time.

A distinction was made between shudras and untouchables. A shudra having sexual intercourse with a Chandala woman was to be reduced to her position. The practice of untouchability became more widespread and severe than in the earlier period. The lawgivers perscribed penance for removing the sin arising out of touching a Chandala. Fa-hsien informs us that Chandalas entering the gate of a city or marketplace would strike a piece of wood to give prior notice of their arrival so that other men could avoid them. The untouchables in general and the Chandalas in particular are described in contemporary texts in very disparaging terms. They are associated with impurity, untruth, theft, heterodoxy, useless quarrels, passion, wrath, and greed.

The *varna* system does not seem to have functioned smoothly. The *Shanti Parva* of the *Mahabharata*, which may be assigned to the Gupta period, contains at least nine verses which stress the need of a combination of brahmanas and kshatriyas; this may indicate some kind of concerted opposition to them by the vaishyas and shudras. In one of these passages the complaint is made that at one stage the vaishyas and shudras wilfully began to unite with the wives of brahmanas. The shudras seem to have been particularly hostile to the existing social order. The *Anushashana Parva* of the *Mahabharata* represents them as the destroyers of the king. Another contemporary work describes them as hostile, violent, boastful, short-tempered, untruthful, extremely greedy, ungrateful, heterodox, lazy, and impure. All this as well as passages from the legal texts would suggest a conflict between the shudras and the ruling classes. But references to actual revolts by the shudras against the upper classes are not recorded in the sources of the Gupta period.

The ruling classes often used religion for maintaining the social order based on *varna*. Already in the *Gita*, vaishyas, shudras, and women were condemned by Krishna as people of low origin. This view found forceful expression in several texts of the Gupta period. Ą

passage in the *Mahabharata* tells us that the shudra can achieve salvation only through service of the twice-born and devotion to god. It is emphasized here and in the Puranas that a shudra can obtain brahmanahood in the next birth through good conduct. This emphasis derived from the theory of *karma*, according to which the fortune, social status, happiness, or sorrow of a person depended on his actions in his previous birth. *Karma* (literally 'work' or 'deed') would ripen like a seed planted in the previous season. The doctrine appealed to members of various *varnas*; for even a shudra could hope to be reborn as a king in the next birth if his karmic balance sheet proved to be favourable. In the *Mrichchhakatika* of Shudraka, a bullock-cart driver refuses to kill Vasantasena precisely because he does not want to repeat the sort of crimes which made him a slave in this birth. Evidently such a belief did not permit the masses to blame their miseries on human agency, and laid stress on the necessity of adhering to the duties traditionally prescribed for the *varnas* to which they belonged.

The doctrine of *bhakti*, enunciated first in the *Gita* and a vital force in Vaishnavism and Shaivism, became socially more relevant from the Gupta period onwards. It preached that one could obtain final liberation only through devotion to and faith in god, and not just by performing sacrifices. God was accessible to all through *bhakti*. This new form of piety was in tune with the newly emerging social outlook of the times, when the feudatories considered themselves as meditating at the feet of their masters. This explains the new accent on the doctrine of *bhakti* in Vaishnavism, Shaivism, and Mahayana Buddhism during Gupta and post-Gupta times.

The messianic aspect of Vaishnavism, and to a lesser extent Shaivism, also became socially more meaningful in the context of the emerging feudal social structure of the time. It consisted in the theory of incarnation, first mentioned in the *Gita* and developed under the influence of the Buddhist doctrine of the Bodhisattvas. According to some texts, Vishnu goes through as many as thirty-nine *avataras*, though in the most usual classification the number is fixed at ten. They are: Matsya (fish), Kurma (tortoise), Varaha (Boar), Narasimha (man-lion), Vamana (dwarf), Parashurama, Rama, Krishna, Buddha, and Kalki. A different list, however, is found in the *Vayu Purana*, a work of the Gupta period. It mentions Narayana, Narasimha, Vamana, Dattatreya,

Mandhata, Jamdagnya, Rama, Vedavyasa, Krishna, and Kalki; the first three are described as divine incarnations and the rest as human. Vishnu is said to have appeared in each of the above incarnations as a saviour. He is also supposed to appear at the end of the Kali age on horseback to uproot the *mlechchhas* and to restore *dharma*. Thus, the theory of incarnations (*avataravada*) fostered a hopeful belief in the coming of a redeemer who would deliver his devotees from the miseries of the world. This vision must have appealed particularly to the lower social orders. The doctrine was also adopted by Shaivism, though Shiva continued to be worshipped chiefly in the form of a *linga* (phallus).

In the Gupta period female divinities, mostly of tribal origin and background, began to attain a position of importance which they had never enjoyed before. Mother goddesses had been worshipped at all times in India, but now they emerged from their obscurity and came to be clearly associated with important Brahmanical gods, anticipating the prominence they were destined to achieve in later times. Shri or Shri-Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and plenty, became popular among the vaishyas and the shudras, and was recognized as the wife of Vishnu; the earliest epigraph referring to this union belongs to the time of Skandagupta. Parvati became the spouse of Shiva; perhaps the first artistic representation of her marriage is assigned to the time of Kumaragupta I. The assimilation of female deities into the Brahmanical pantheon led to the growth of the Shakti cult which preached that the male could be activated only through union with a female. The phenomenon owed much to the interaction between Brahmanical and tribal ideas, facilitated by the ever-increasing number of brahmana settlements in the backward areas; it later became the central feature of the Tantric religion.

Of all the Brahmanical sects Vaishnavism became the most popular under the patronage of the Gupta rulers. It spread in different parts of the country and even travelled across the seas to South-East Asia. The union of Shri-Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, with Vishnu added to the prestige of the new religion; its spread among the lower orders was facilitated by her earlier popularity among the vaishyas and shudras. The Vishnu cult fulfilled the needs of all sections of society. The kings could pose as incarnations of the god; a Puranic text written probably in the time of Chandragupta II describes a king as endowed with the

energy of Vishnu. This led to the exaltation of kingship. The rich could earn religious merit by setting up images of gods and building temples for them. The poor could hope to improve their condition in the next birth while in this birth they could derive solace from the appearance of the god in the form of an *avatara*. The adoption of various deities, beliefs, and superstitions by Vaishnavism indicates that it had assimilated different popular cults and had substituted faith for logic. It, therefore, acted as an effective instrument for reconciling the masses to their lot and for maintaining the social divisions based on *varna*.

The existence of Shaivism and its various subsects in the Gupta period is amply borne out by the sources. Shiva is extolled as the highest god in some of the Puranas. Like Vaishnavism, Shaivism also received royal support. At least two Shiva temples of the period have survived, one at Nachna Kuttara and the other at Nagod (both places in Madhya Pradesh). A sculpture from Mathura shows a devotee offering his head to Shiva. Perhaps some extreme subsects of the cult preached such practices as human sacrifice. The extreme character of Shaivism explains why it was less popular than Vaishnavism, and whatever success it achieved in the Gupta period may have been largely owing to the doctrines it shared with the Vaishnava system.

Buddhism had already split into two major sects, Hinayana and Mahayana, each with a number of subsects. Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Cambodia, and China had by now developed into centres of Hinayana. Fa-hsien noticed the existence of the Hinayana following in Lobnor, Darada, Udyana, Gandhara, Bannu, Kanauj, and Kashmir. But the Mahayanist branch had also come to stay. Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Asanga, Vasubandhu, and Dignaga, all exponents of the Mahayana sect, flourished in the Gupta period. Through its emphasis on *bhakti* and image worship and its enlarged pantheon which included male and female deities, Mahayanism came closer to the Brahmanical religion; under its influence Buddhism seems to have lost much of its original heretical fervour. Fa-hsien met Mahayana monks in Afghanistan, Bhida (Panjab), Mathura, and Pataliputra; in Khotan, we are told, all monks were Mahayanists. With the decline of trade, however, much of the support that Buddhism had received earlier from the mercantile class ceased in the subsequent period and its establishments became increasingly dependent on the grants of land and villages in course of time.

Jainism largely remained conservative but by the Gupta period seems to have developed icons. Two Jaina councils were summoned simultaneously at Mathura and Valabhi in AD 313. The Jaina canonical texts were standardized and were later committed to writing at another council held in AD 453 at Valabhi. Mathura and Valabhi seem to have been the strongholds of Shvetambara Jainism and Pundravardhana in north Bengal was a centre of the Digambara sect. In certain areas of the Deccan and south India Jainism received support from the local ruling houses, though much of this patronage ceased in the later period. Christianity remained mainly restricted to Malabar. Here a Syrian Christian church continued to exist, and Kalyana near Bombay is said to have received a bishop from Persia. Several prominent Indian citizens belong to this order even today.

The Gupta period may be said to be a landmark in the development of philosophical ideas. The continuing philosophical debate now veered round the six schools of thought (*shaddarshana*), which became the chief feature of Indian philosophy. The six systems were: *nyaya* (analysis), *vaisheshika* (individual characteristics), *sankhya* (enumeration), *yoga* (application), *mimamsa* (inquiry), and *vedanta* (end of the Vedas). *Nyaya* was a school of logic and epistemology deriving mainly from the *sutras* or aphorisms of Akshapada Gautama, who may have lived in the early centuries of the Christian era. Pakshilasvamin Vatsyayana, its main expositor, may be referred to the fourth century AD. *Vaisheshika* was complementary to and older than *nyaya*. It was a type of atomic philosophy interested mainly in physics rather than theology. The legendary founder of the system was Uluka Kanada; the greatest of his commentators Prashastapada perhaps lived in the sixth century. *Sankhya* teaches twenty-five basic principles; its central thought is the polarity of *purusha* (soul, person) and *prakriti* (matter). The earliest surviving text of the school is the *Sankhyakarika* of Ishvarakrishna, perhaps of the fourth century. *Yoga* dealt with the physical control of the body, and its basic text goes back to the *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali of the second century BC. But the redaction of the *sutras* in their present form is attributed to Vyasa who lived seven centuries later. *Mimamsa* sought to explain and revive the Vedas. Although the earliest work of the school is said to be the *Sutras* of Jaimini (perhaps sixth century BC), the greatest of the early *mimamsa* scholars was Shabarasvamin who flourished in the sixth century AD. *Vedanta* (also called *Uttara-mimamsa*), claiming to have originated from the Vedas, forcefully

rejected the theories of the non-Brahmanical schools. Badarayana is said to have formulated its main tenets in the early Christian centuries. But Gaudapada, an important thinker of this school, lived around the middle of the sixth century AD, though the most forceful exposition of its doctrines came from Shankaracharya in the eighth-ninth centuries, when Vedanta became an abiding theme of Indian philosophy. Unlike the various theistic sects, however, the abstract philosophical debate centred on the six systems and had no social base in the Gupta period.

Religion was intimately connected with developments in architecture and the plastic arts. The doctrine of *bhakti* and the growing importance of image worship led to the construction of the free standing temple with a sanctuary (*garbhagriha*), in which the central cult image was placed. Several temples with central shrines have survived from the Gupta period. Mention may be made of the temples at Sanchi, Ladh Khan, Deogarh (near Jhansi), Bhitaragaon, Tigawa, and Bhumara. Built either in stone or brick, they were very small and had roofs with spouts to drain off water. The earliest of the surviving Gupta temples is the one standing to the left of the *chaitya* hall at Sanchi (designated as Temple no. 17). It consists of an enclosed cella

Plate 21: Gupta Temple, Sanchi.

with a columned portico in front; this plan formed the nucleus of all later Indian temples. The most ornate and beautifully composed example of Gupta temple building, however, is the fragmentary temple of Vishnu at Deogarh. It occupies the centre of a square plinth, each of whose four corners had a subsidiary shrine, housing a lesser deity. It may be one of the earliest specimens of the five-shrine (*panchayatana*) variety of temples which became common in subsequent times and which reflected the feudal hierarchization of the ever expanding Indian pantheon. But the development of free standing temples did not altogether displace cave temples. Some of the caves at Ajanta may be assigned to the period of the Guptas, though perhaps the highest achievement of the early Indian cave architecture is seen in the Kailashanath temple at Ellora, belonging to the eighth century.

Gupta sculpture marks the culmination of earlier developments in the plastic arts. The unusual, larger-than-life size horse sculpture from Khairigarh in Uttar Pradesh, often believed to represent a sacrificial horse used by Samudragupta for one of his *ashwamedha* rituals, has a perceptible affinity with the Kushana plastic tradition. The Brahmanical gods sculpted during the period were mainly incarnations of Vishnu and the lesser Vaishnavite deities. The Shiva cult, still basically concerned with phallic worship, perhaps limited the scope of the sculptural imagination, though several images of Shaivite deities (Durga, Skanda, etc.) have been found. A substantial number of these sculptures come from important centres like Vidisha, Eran, and Udayagiri in Madhya Pradesh. Of these Udayagiri occupies a place of importance. Twenty rock-cut chambers were excavated here during the Gupta period and quite a few of the images found here, unlike most of the specimens of Gupta art, can be positively assigned to certain Gupta kings. The crowning achievement of Gupta sculpture is the numerous seated and standing images of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas at Sarnath, where, under the influence of the Mathura tradition, a distinct school of art flourished. A good specimen of Sarnath sculpture is the image of the Buddha sitting in the *dharmachakrapravarttana* attitude. This is a fine expression in stone of the meditative and compassionate Buddha giving his first sermon. The impact of the Sarnath idiom was also felt in eastern and western India and in the Deccan. Its influence, however, decreased as it travelled south where local tendencies dominated.

Painting was a developed art. Literary references prove that apart

22: Buddha. Mathura, Gupta period, National Museum of India.

Plate 23: Façade of Ajanta cave XXVI.

from professional artists, men and women of the upper classes could also ably handle a brush. Remains of Gupta paintings may be seen in the caves at Bagh (cave IV, *c.* AD 500), Ajanta (caves XVI, XVII, XIX, and I, II), and Badami (cave III) in addition to faint traces at several other places. The Ajanta murals supplied the norm for all contemporary painting. The Ajanta artists displayed consummate skill in delineating human and animal figures. The representation of the Bodhisattva announcing his renunciation (cave I) and that of Indra and his entourage flying to greet the Buddha in Tushita heaven (cave XVII) are only a few of the masterpieces. Decorations on ceilings, pedestals of columns, and door- and window-frames speak of the artists' extraordinary powers of conception and technique. Although the themes at Ajanta are religious, one can see in the painting a dramatic

Plate 24: Details of an *apsara*. Fresco, Ajanta cave.

panorama of the life of princes, nobles, warriors, and sages. The general impression we gain is one of the affluence of the upper classes; the normal hardships of the village folk are not portrayed.

In literature, as in art and architecture, the Gupta period witnessed efflorescence. After centuries of evolution Sanskrit language and literature, through lavish royal patronage, reached what has been described as a level of classical excellence. Among the known Sanskrit poets of this period, the greatest name is that of Kalidasa, who lived in the court of Chandragupta II. The *Meghaduta*, his lyrical poem of a little over a hundred graceful stanzas, contains the message from the love-lorn Yaksha to his wife pining across the northern mountains in Alaka. The *Raghuvamsha* speaks of the all-round victories of Rama, and may indirectly refer to some Gupta conquests. The *Kumarasambhava* deals with the courtship of Shiva and Parvati and the birth of their son Skanda: the much-trumpeted ascetic tradition seems to have taken a beating at the hands of ancient India's greatest poet. The *Ritusamhara* describes the six seasons in relation to the loves of man and woman and exhibits the poet's loving empathy with nature. The poems of Kalidasa remain unequalled in their metrical and verbal perfection. The *Vikramorvashiyam*, one of his finest plays, is based on the Vedic story of the mad love of Pururvas for the 'fierce-souled' Urvashi whom Kalidasa transforms into a happy and obedient wife. His most famous work, the play *Abhijnanashakuntalam*, has for its theme the union of king Dushyanta with Shakuntala. Elaborating on the narrative of the *Mahabharata*, it portrays the transformation of an assertive and 'liberated' Shakuntala into a docile and submissive woman conforming to the prevailing patriarchal values. The work remains the supreme achievement of early Indian literature and stagecraft.

Several other dramatists are said to have flourished during the Gupta period. Shudraka, often supposed to be of royal lineage, wrote the *Mrichchhakatika*. Its plot centres round the love of the poor brahmana Charudatta for the wealthy, beautiful, accomplished, and cultured courtesan Vasantasena. Vishakhadatta is the author of the *Mudrarakshasa*, which deals with the schemes of the shrewd Chanakya. The *Devichandraguptam*, another drama written by him, has survived only in fragments.

The best poets and playwrights often found their richest and most creative canvas in the passionate physical love of men for women;

literary descriptions of feminine beauty often tally with the voluptuous female figures represented in the Ajanta murals. Erotica, in fact, became prominent in the literary world from the Gupta period onwards, and the *Kamasutra* of Vatsyayana, the first systematic exposition of the art of love, remained a model for later writers on the subject patronized by the feudal aristocracy and the ruling class. The life of the royal court, therefore, is richly reflected in Sanskrit plays and poems, the only possible exception being the *Mrichchhakatika*. Sanskrit literature, like art, was mainly enjoyed by the royal court, the upper classes, and the aristocracy. Therefore, the leading male characters of high social status in the contemporary plays speak polished Sanskrit, and those of low status, women, and brahmana buffoon (*vidushaka*) speak Prakrit.

The Gupta period saw an increase in the production of religious literature. This is clear from the fact that some of the most important of the eighteen Puranas (the *Markandeya*, *Brahmanda*, *Vishnu*, *Bhagavata*, and *Matsya*) were finally redacted during this period. The Puranas were originally composed by bards; in almost all of them the Suta Lomaharshana or his son Ugrashrava appears as the narrator. But by now they had fallen into the hands of brahmana compilers who often introduced new gods into them and made substantial interpolations. The *Mahabharata*, traditionally attributed to Vyasa, was also redacted; it was inflated from its original 24,000 verses to 100,000 verses. There is much in common between this epic and the law books. Some of the injunctions of Manu, for instance, occur in identical form in the *Shanti Parva* of the *Mahabharata* which, contrary to the generally held view, may imply that this legal text belongs to the Gupta period. Several other law books like those of Vishnu, Yajnavalkya, Narada, Brihaspati, and Katyayana may also have been composed during Gupta times. The Brahmanical world-view found in the epics, Puranas, and Dharmashastra texts is reflected in the various versions of the *Panchatantra* fables which were elaborated in prose interspersed with gnomic verses.

Some important astronomical works were also written during the Gupta period. Aryabhata, the author of the *Aryabhatiyam*, flourished in the fifth century. Contrary to the prevalent notions, he suggested that the earth rotates on its axis, revolves round the sun, and causes eclipses by casting its shadow on the moon. All these ideas did not affect the development of much of the later Indian astronomical

thought and practice and the credulous masses continue to believe in the orthodox view of the demon swallowing up the moon to cause eclipses. There is, however, no doubt that it was through his efforts that astronomy branched off as a separate discipline from mathematics. He was the first to use the decimal place-value system; but its invention is not attributed to him. Varahmihira, who lived towards the end of the sixth century, wrote several treatises on astronomy and horoscopy. His *Panchasiddhantika* deals with five astronomical systems (*siddhanta*); two of these assume a close knowledge of Greek astronomy. The *Laghu* and *Brihajjataka*, both written by him, are works on horoscopy which became popular from the Gupta period onwards. The Sanskrit language was also enriched by the development of lexicography. The *Amarakosha* (also called the *Namalinganushasana*) compiled by Amarasimha has remained an indispensable lexicon till our own times.

The period of the imperial Guptas is described in most standard books on Indian history as one of a Hindu renaissance. This is far from true. The highest achievements of Gupta sculpture are the Buddhist images from Sarnath; the best contemporary paintings from Ajanta have Buddhist themes. Progress in astronomical knowledge as represented in the writings of Aryabhata and Varahamihira owed only in part to the indigenous tradition. One of the five astronomical systems dealt with by Varahamihira was the *Romakasiddhanta*, which evidently referred to the Roman system; another, the *Paulishasiddhanta*, is explained as a recollection of the name of the classical astronomer Paul of Alexandria. The main components of the so-called Hindu renaissance, therefore, are the writings of Kalidasa, the composition of some of the Puranas, and the coins and inscriptions which indicate that the Gupta kings patronized the two Brahmanical sects, Vaishnavism and Shaivism. But the work of Kalidasa is not indicative of an intellectual rebirth or revival of literary activity; it merely implies a development of the literary forms and styles which were evolving in an earlier period. The Puranas had existed much before the time of the Guptas in the form of bardic literature; in the Gupta age some of them were finally compiled and given their present form. Nor does the growing popularity of Vaishnavism and Shaivism mean any religious resurgence. The basic tenets of the two religions go back to earlier times; now in the context of emerging feudal conditions they could attract a greater following. The use of the term 'Hindu' is equally

erroneous. It was first used by the Persian Achaemenid rulers in the sixth century BC and later by the Arabs in the post-Gupta period to describe the inhabitants of Hindu (India). Ancient Indians never thought of themselves as Hindus. The much publicized Hindu renaissance was, in reality, not a renaissance, much less a Hindu one.

The Gupta rulers, with the exception of the 'ignoble' Ramagupta, are also credited with a revival of nationalism, presumably because they fought against the Shakas and Hunas. No extant court drama or Sanskrit poetical work directly refers to any Gupta ruler. The only contemporary reference to them is found in the Puranas, which contemptuously group them with petty kings described as 'barbarous (*mlechchhapraya*), impious, dishonest (or liars), niggardly and highly irascible'. Praise is showered on the Guptas only in their own inscriptions, Samudragupta's eulogy being the longest. Soon after their fall they joined the legion of the forgotten, and their memory was not revived until the nineteenth century when their records were deciphered. The documents were seized upon by nationalist Indian scholars, who used them justifiably as counter-arguments to the persistent British imperialist propaganda that India had no history except for a series of conquests by a succession of invaders. It has been rightly remarked that 'far from the Guptas reviving nationalism, it was nationalism that revived the Guptas'.

Some Indian historians have been so enamoured of the Guptas as to tirelessly speak of their rule as representing a golden age in Indian history. In an emotionally surcharged multi-volume work we are told in a vein of romantic lamentation: 'Life was never happier.' Yet it was during that time that in certain parts of the country serfdom first appeared, leading eventually to the economic bondage of the peasantry. Women became an item of property and came to live in the perpetual tutelage of men, notwithstanding their idealization in art and literature. Caste distinctions and caste rigidity became sharper than ever before; law and justice showed a definite bias in favour of the higher castes. Fa-hsien tells us that the people were generally happy. True, the upper classes were happy and prosperous, and lived in comfort and ease, as can be judged from contemporary art and literature, but this was certainly not true of the lower orders. The Chinese pilgrim himself speaks of the plight of the Chandalas. The untouchable class as a whole came to be degraded further in the social scale. Social tensions

continued. But religion was used as an instrument for maintaining the *varna*-divided society. For the upper classes all periods in history have been golden; for the masses none. But the dystopia of the present has often led historians to look for a utopia in the past and the Indian ruling class loses no opportunity to exploit this nostalgic longing for a golden age to its own advantage.

CHAPTER 9

Emergence of Feudal India

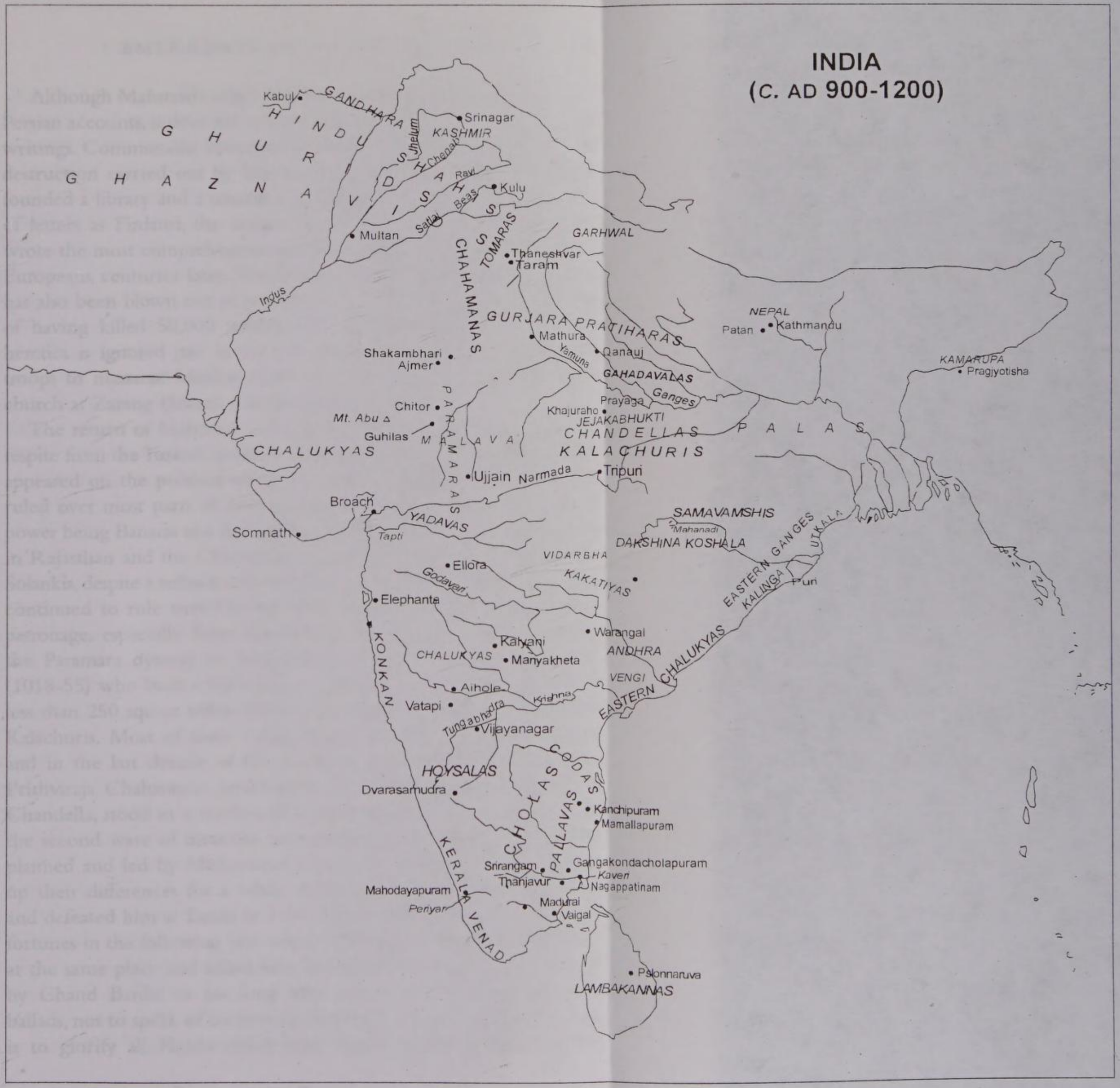
The so-called golden age of Indian history ended with the decline of the Guptas and their feudatories in the sixth century AD. The subsequent period, generally referred to as the early medieval period, saw the emergence of numerous ruling dynasties in different parts of the country. On a rough count their number may be nearly one hundred so that nothing more than a very broad outline of the political scenario can be presented here. The most important ruling family that rose to prominence soon after the Guptas was that of the Pushyabhutis of Thaneswar (Sthanvishwara). Its scion Harshavardhana, a Buddhist convert, began his rule in AD 606 and captured Kanauj (Kanyakubja near modern Kanpur) which, for strategic reasons, remained a focal point of north Indian politics for nearly 600 years. Immortalized by his proégé Banabhatta who wrote his colourful biography and the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Hsüan Tsang who visited India during his reign (630-43) and spoke of his Buddhist predilections in glowing terms, Harshavardhana easily extended his sway in eastern India and Orissa after the death (619) of the notoriously anti-Buddhist Shaivite king Shashanka of Bengal who had earlier damaged the Buddhist monastery at Gaya and cut down the Bodhi tree there. Harsha included among his tributary rulers those of Nepal, Jalandhar (in Panjab), Kashmir, Valabhi, and Assam, all of them becoming independent soon after his death in 647. He thus ruled over a substantial portion of north India and was described as lord of the north (*sakalottarapathanatha*). But he met a crushing defeat at the hands of his great southern contemporary Pulakeshin II of the Chalukya dynasty of Badami (Karnataka) and could never cross the Narmada. The death of Harsha was followed by a confusion that lasted until the eighth century when Yashovarman established his kingdom at Kanauj and controlled much of north India for a while. He, however, soon fell to Lalitaditya of Kashmir who played an

important role in contemporary north Indian politics, and who, according to the later source, even pushed back the Arabs who had occupied Sind in 712.

In the following two centuries three great dynasties, the Palas, Gurjara-Pratiharas, and Rashtrakutas, vied for political hegemony in north India. The Palas gained ascendancy in Bihar and Bengal. Their power reached an apogee during the reign of Dharmapala (770-810) who was able to keep Kanauj under his control until his death. His successor Devapala (810-50) was also an important ruler and was in close diplomatic contact with the kings of Sumatra; one of them even requested him for permission to endow a Buddhist monastery at Nalanda. Known chiefly for their patronage of Buddhism, which was introduced into Tibet during their rule, the Palas remained a premier power for a time in north India, and were succeeded by the Senas of Bengal only to fall prey to the Ghorian general Muhammad Bakhtyar Khalji in the beginning of the thirteenth century.

The Gurjara-Pratiharas, who probably descended from the Gurjaras of Rajasthan, came to prominence in the ninth and tenth centuries. They not only pushed back the Palas and wrested Kanauj from them but also successfully resisted the Arabs. During the rule of Mihirabhoja (*c.*840-85) and Mahendrapala (*c.* 885-910), the two most powerful kings of the dynasty, the Gurjara-Pratiharas were overlords of most parts of northern India as far as the borders of Bengal. They were, however, weakened by the frequent invasions of the Rashtrakutas of Manyakheta (Malkhed or Mankir to the south of Gulbarga in Karnataka) who succeeded in diverting their attention from north-western India—the region which became the launching pad for Turkish raids under Mahmud of Ghazni.

Mahmud made seventeen rapacious raids between 1001 and 1027 and plundered the temple towns of Mathura, Thaneshwar, and Kanauj. His most famous campaign was the one he led to Saurashtra. Here he defeated the Solanki ruler Bhimadeva (1026) and sacked the shrine of Somanatha, often projected as one of the richest temples of the time though a twelfth-century Sanskrit text dealing with pilgrim centres does not single it out for special treatment. Mahmud is said to have returned with 20 million gold *dinars* (about 6.5 tons of gold) to his capital Ghazni and, according to British accounts, with the wooden gates of the temple.



Source: Based on J.E. Schwarzberg, ed., *A Historical Atlas of South Asia* (Chicago, 1978), p. 32.

Although Mahmud's attack has been much glorified in the Turko-Persian accounts, it does not occupy an important place in indigenous writings. Communalist historians have spilt much ink on the tales of destruction carried out by him so that it is often forgotten that he founded a library and a museum at Ghazni and patronized such men of letters as Firdausi, the author of *Shahnama*, and Al-Beruni, who wrote the most comprehensive account of India before the advent of Europeans centuries later. The Islamic fundamentalism of Mahmud has also been blown out of proportion. In the process his own claim of having killed 50,000 infidels and an equal number of Muslim heretics is ignored just as the famous incident of his using Hindu troops to massacre Muslim rebels in a mosque and Christians in a church at Zarang (Sistan) is deliberately forgotten.

The return of Mahmud was followed by more than a century of respite from the Turkish invasions during which several royal dynasties appeared on the political scene of northern India. The Gahadavalas ruled over most parts of present-day Uttar Pradesh, their centres of power being Banaras and Kanauj. The Chahamanas rose to prominence in Rajasthan and the Chandellas in Bundelkhand. The Chaukyas or Solankis, despite a setback received on account of Mahmud's campaign, continued to rule over Gujarat where Jainism received much royal patronage, especially from Kumarapala. In Malwa, there flourished the Paramara dynasty to which belonged the scholar king Bhoja (1018-55) who built a big lake near Bhopal covering an area of not less than 250 square miles. Madhya Pradesh was in the hands of the Kalachuris. Most of these ruling houses fought among themselves and in the last decade of the twelfth century three Rajput kings, Prithviraja Chahamana, Jayachandra Gahadavala, and Paramardideva Chandella, stood in a relation of tripartite animosity and war. When the second wave of invasions from Afganistan in the north-east was planned and led by Muhammad Ghori, the Indian princes patched up their differences for a while under the leadership of Prithviraja and defeated him at Tarain in 1191. There was, however, a reversal of fortunes in the following year when Muhammad defeated Prithviraja at the same place and killed him, though he has been immortalized by Chand Bardai in his long epic poem and by numerous folk ballads, not to speak of communal historians whose favourite pastime is to glorify all Hindu chiefs who fought against Muslim rulers.

Muhammad returned home and left behind his general, Qutub-ud-din Aibak to lead further campaigns of conquest culminating in the establishment of the Sultanate at Delhi, but that is a different story.

Although the Arab and Turkish invasions did not affect the Indian peninsula, the political landscape of the region, much like that of northern India, was marked by the rise of numerous kingdoms. As we have seen, the supremacy of the Chalukyas in the Deccan was an established fact in the seventh century when Pulakeshin II not only defeated Harshavardhana but also established a collateral branch of his family at Vengi in eastern Andhra Pradesh. The Chalukyas had to contend with the Rashtrakutas, who replaced one of their branches, and emerged as an important political factor in the eighth century. The best remembered Rashtrakuta king was Amoghavarsha whose long reign (817-77) was not marked by any spectacular military achievements but was distinguished for his patronage of Jainism and Kannada literature, his court being adorned by a galaxy of Jaina authors, including his own spiritual preceptor Harishena.

The Chalukyas also faced a challenge from the Pallavas of Kanchi who had emerged as a strong regional power of northern Tamilnadu and were constantly engaged in warfare with them. The two best-known Pallava kings, Mahendravarman (*c.* 600-30) and Narasimhavarman (630-68), fought with their Chalukya adversaries and their successors. The fortunes of their dynasty, however, continued to decline under pressure from the Chalukyas and the Gangas of Mysore until the end of the ninth century. Around this time the Cholas of Tanjore rose to prominence after centuries of oblivion and annexed the Pallava territories. They ruled over the Coromandel coast and much of the eastern Deccan, providing security to its people for a major part of the next three centuries. The most notable among them were Rajaraja I (985-1014) and Rajendra I (1014-42). During their reigns the Cholas reached as far north as the mouth of the Ganga, sent out naval expeditions to South-East Asia, and conquered Sri Lanka. Their power was, however, considerably weakened in the last decades of the twelfth century when the Sri Lankan king began to assert his independence. The Cholas finally fell in the thirteenth century and several local tributary princes emerged as independent kings. The Hoysalas of Mysore (Karnataka) and the Kakatiyas of

Warangal (Andhra Pradesh) became important in the Deccan. The Pandyas of Madurai, after a long period of hostility with the Cholas, reasserted their authority in the far south. But in due course they all succumbed to the strength of the Delhi Sultans.

The above narrative of the political developments, albeit sketchy, clearly indicates that the post-Gupta centuries saw the emergence of a large number of regional kingdoms. Their territorial limits often coincided with regional cultural zones like Andhra, Assam, Bengal, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan and Tamilnadu. The Gurjaras, who founded kingdoms in Rajasthan and Gujarat, paved the way for the formation of what later came to be known as Gurjaradesha. The Rajputs, who became a significant factor in early medieval north Indian polity, gave Rajasthan its name. Vanga and Gauda were the two units of Bengal and subsequently, together they came to be known as Vanga.

The regionalized societies in the early medieval period were consolidated by the growth of regional languages. Sanskrit continued to be the language of the elite, but its imposition on and interaction with local Aryan and pre-Aryan dialects in the wake of Brahmanical penetration in the backward areas quickened the pace of linguistic variation in many parts of the country. Thus, proto-Bengali, proto-Assamese, proto-Oriya, proto-Maithili, proto-Hindi, proto-Rajasthani, and proto-Gujarati, etc., can be traced back to early medieval times. In southern India Tamil, the parent Dravidian language, had been the repository of rich literature from very early times. But now several other languages of the Dravidian family evolved. The beginning of literary activity in Kannada, thus, goes back to the ninth-tenth century and in Telegu to the tenth-eleventh. The earliest work in Kannada is the *Kavirajamarga*, a work on poetics by the king Amoghavarsha (ninth century) and in Telugu it is Nannaya's incomplete translation of the *Mahabharata* (eleventh century). The earliest literary work in Malayalam may not be earlier than the thirteenth century and it possibly developed as a distinct language slightly later than the other two languages of the Dravidian family. The growth of regional languages in different parts of the Indian subcontinent went hand in hand with the evolution of regional scripts; Al-Beruni (eleventh century) refers to as many as eleven scripts.

A remarkable assertion of regionalism is illustrated by the evolution

Plate 25: Lingaraja Temple, Eastern Ganga, eleventh century, Bhubaneswar.

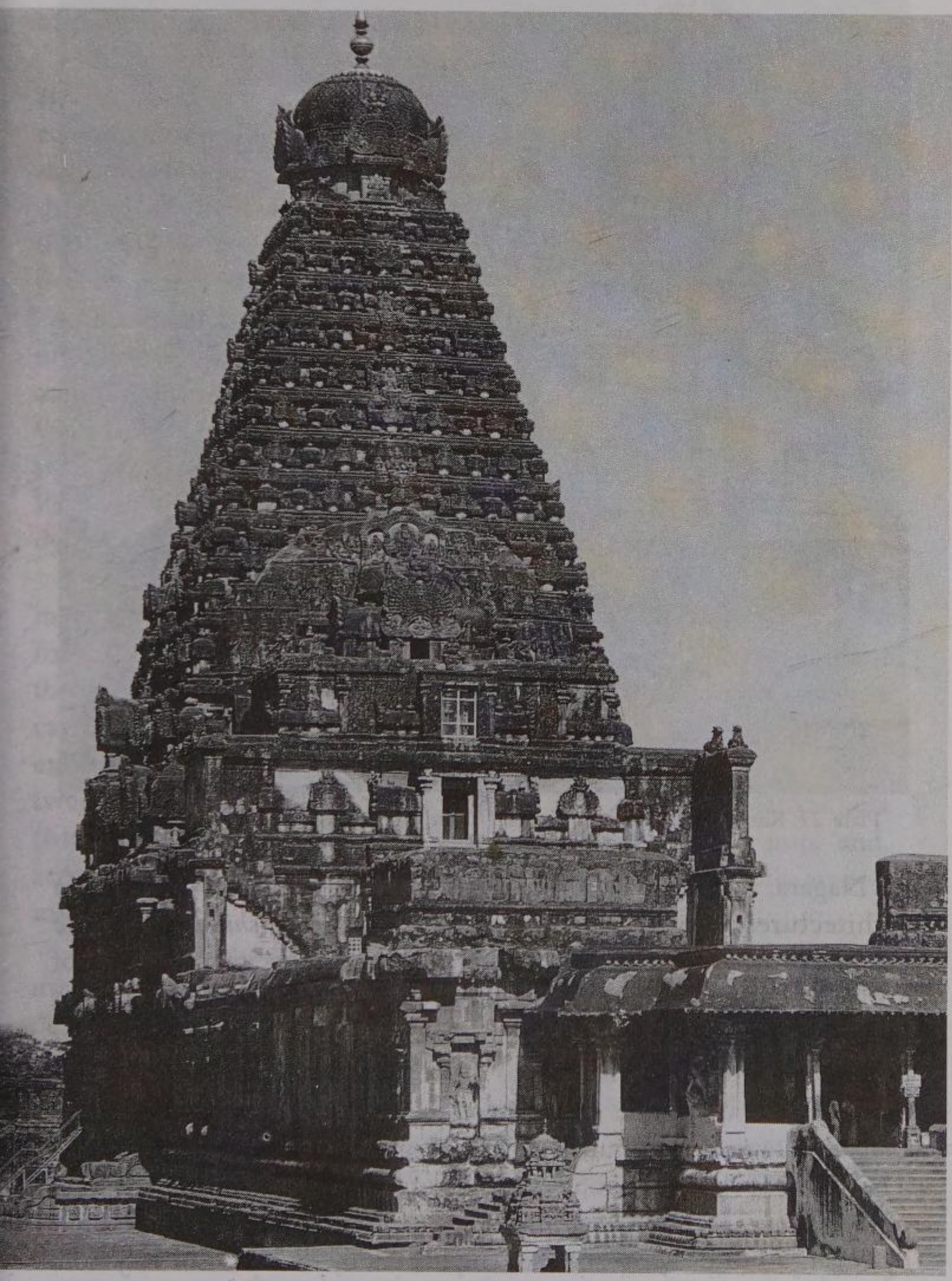


Plate 26. Brihadaresara Temple, Tanjore, *c.*1000.

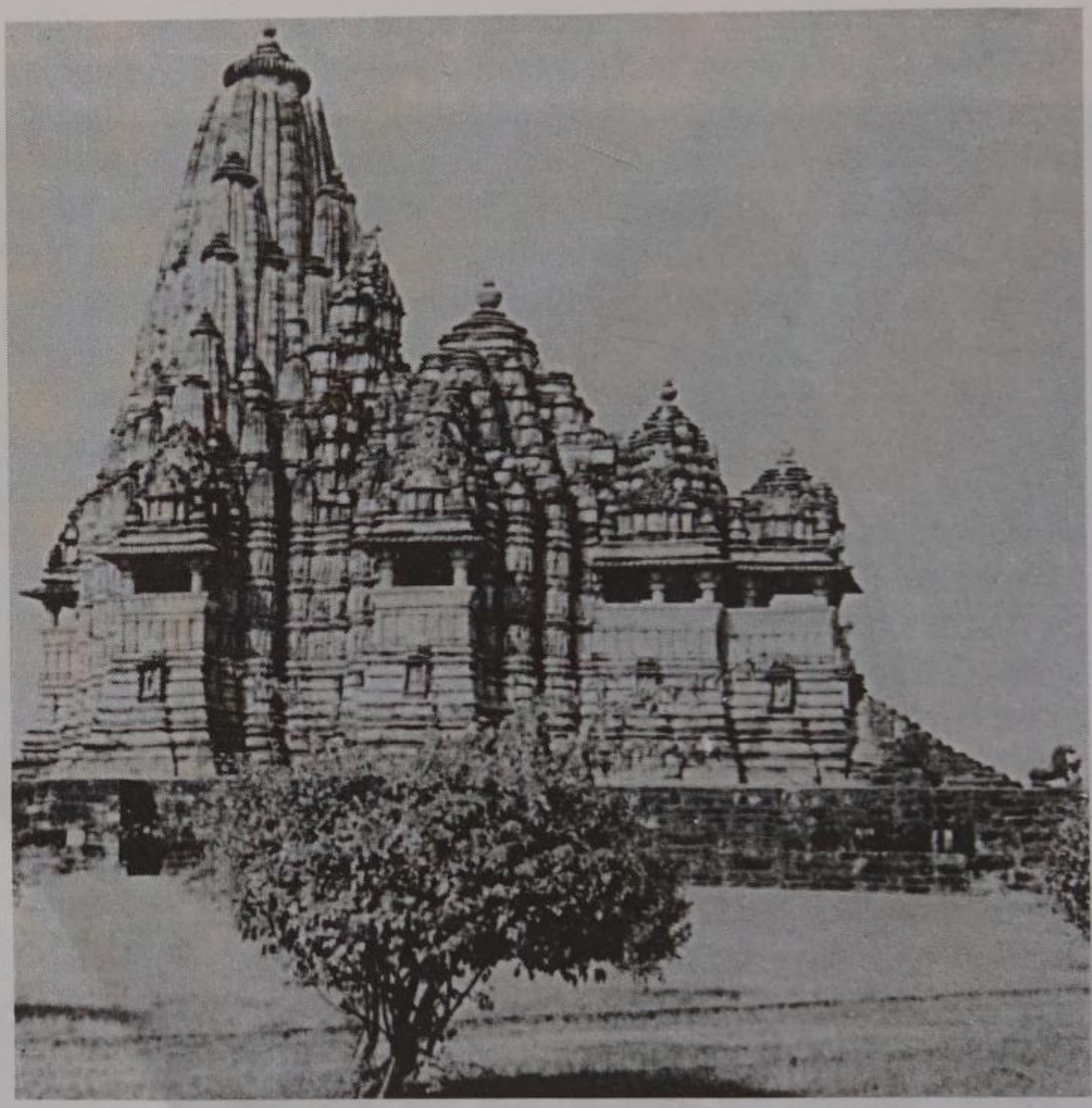


Plate 27: Kandariya Mahadeva Temple, Chandella, Khajuraho, eleventh century.

of Nagara, Dravida, and Vesara or Chalukyan styles of temple architecture. A typical temple tower or spire (*shikhara*) is the characteristic feature of the Nagara style. It is seen in most parts of northern India, especially central India, Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Orissa. Each of these had their own regional peculiarities, some times prominent enough to give rise to a distinct style. Orissa, for example, developed its own style of architecture, its best specimens being the Lingaraja temple at Bhubaneswar and the Sun temple at Konarak. The Dravida style of temple architecture developed during the rule of the Cholas. Its finest examples are the Shiva temple at Tanjore built by Rajaraja I (985-1014) and the temple built by his successor Rajendra at Gongaikondacholapuram, near Kumbakonam. *Vesara* literally means 'mule', and, by implication, has been used as a description of a hybrid

of architectural forms. The interfusion of architectural styles is seen in different parts of the country, but the word is used for the buildings of the later Chalukyas of Kalyana and the Hoysalas.

The regional polities were characterized by decentralized political and administrative structures due to the stabilization of the politico-economic structure called feudalism. Its political aspect is best seen in the *samanta* system, a lord-vassal complex in which the king was at the top of the hierarchy of vassals (*samantas*) ranked according to their status in the royal court as well as according to the area of land that he granted to them.

The practice of assignment of land and creation of fiefs became ubiquitous throughout the country. Its beneficiaries discharged administrative duties in lieu of land assignments and gradually replaced the earlier centrally controlled bureaucracy. Thus, the nature of the state, which appeared in the time of Harshavardhana, and under the Palas, Pratiharas, Chalukyas, Pallavas, and Cholas and other ruling dynasties, was feudal.

In the early medieval feudal political structure central authority inevitably became weak. Several royal dynasties did not even have fixed capitals and they ruled from shifting camps in order to impress their feudatories and administrative functionaries. The Palas, for instance, carried on their administration from nine victory camps/royal encampments (*skandhavaras*) and the Chandellas from as many as twenty-one. The Rashtrakutas had their capital at Manyakheta (Malkhed), though they issued land grants from several camps and, according to an Arab account, their government was generally among mountains.

What is true of these dynasties may not be true of all early medieval ruling families. But there is no doubt that the feudal developments, whose beginnings go back to the earlier period, led to the parcellization of sovereignty in almost all parts of India during early medieval times. Now the kings, more than ever before, sought to make up for the loss of real power and authority by deifying themselves as well as by appropriating grandiose and vainglorious titles. Already in the earlier period Samudragupta had claimed divine attributes and had taken on pompous titles. Now the practice became common among the rulers who used the increasingly popular idea of incarnation to their advantage. Chandradeva and Govindachandra of

the Gahadavala dynasty were described as the incarnations of Brahma and Hari respectively. The 'infamous' Jayachandra of the same dynasty as well as his much-lionized adversary Prithviraja of the Chahamana family were portrayed in contemporary sources as the incarnation of Rama. The Pallava Parameshvaravarman was equated with Shiva and Mahendravarman with Mahendra (Vishnu). The Chola king Rajaraja I was described as no less than Shiva. Divinization of monarchy was facilitated by the fabrication of respectable genealogies. Most rulers from the seventh century onwards claimed kshatriya status and traced their origin back to Manu, descendants of his son Iksvaku being of the solar line and those of his daughter Ila belonging to the lunar family. For example, in north India the Gahadavalas and Chandellas claimed a lunar origin. In south India the Cholas boasted of their solar ancestry and the Pandyas took pride in their supposed descent from the moon. The only Rajput families that did not fit into this pattern were the Pratiharas, Chahamanas, Paramaras, and Chaulukyas of Gujarat who claimed to have descended from the mythical figure that arose out of the sacrificial pit near Mt Abu in Rajasthan. The kings also appropriated vainglorious titles, some times more than a dozen. Deification of kings and the use of magniloquent titles by them were intended to enhance their prestige and glamour and to make up for the loss of their authority. Pompous pretensions, however, did not invest them with power. Now the real wielders of authority were the graded hierarchy of vassals and recipients of land assignments.

The number of the landed intermediaries increased over time on account of the rapid pace of economic changes in the second half of the first millennium AD. Long distance trade, declining in the Gupta period, shrank further. Archaeological data from the sites excavated in the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf in the west and South-East Asia in the east indicate a sluggish commercial contact with the outside world. The dismal picture of trade fits in well with the contemporary currency situation. During the period AD 600-900 none of the important ruling houses is known to have issued coins. The Palas did not issue any coins; nor did the Rashtrakutas and Gurjara-Pratiharas. No coins can be attributed to the Eastern Gangas who ruled in Orissa between 900 and 1200 and very few to the south Indian dynasties ruling during AD 600-1000. The general shortage of metal currency ties up well with the striking absence of mints,

moulds, and dies. It is also connected with the process of de-urbanization noticed already in the earlier period. Many towns, which had begun to decay in the Gupta period, now almost disappeared. Pataliputra had dwindled to a village when the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Hsuan Tsang came to India in the seventh century. His account creates an overall impression of the decline of towns in north India. Nearly two hundred years later Merchant Sulaiman, the Arab visitor to western India, reported that the greater part of India was without towns. Archaeological material also testifies to the decay of urban centres. The earlier trends of the decline of trade, paucity of coinage and de-urbanization became stronger, tended to strengthen the autarkic nature of economy, and intensified the process of feudalisation in the early medieval period, leading to an unprecedented increase in the number of landed magnates whose stranglehold over the polity and economy became stronger than ever before.

The self-sufficient nature of economy was, however, disturbed in many parts of the country from about the tenth century when the Chinese and the Arabs began to play an active role in the revival of India's trade with outside world. The influx of Arabs resulted in intimate commercial linkages between India and western Indian Ocean seas. A cordial relationship existed between the Arab merchants settled on the Konkan coast and the Rashtrakuta rulers. They even appointed Muslim governors of cities in their kingdom and allowed mosques to be built for their prayers. There were Arab colonies in Gujarat, Malabar, and other parts of peninsular India; in Chaul (near Mumbai) alone there lived 10,000 Muslims in the early tenth century. Sources refer to a string of ports on the western coast from the Indus delta to Malabar where Jewish traders carried on overseas trade between India and Egypt in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Western India, Konkan, Malabar, and Coromandel became flourishing commercial centres from around the tenth century; references to several south Indian merchant guilds engaged in transregional trade are found in inscriptions and other sources. Al-Beruni (eleventh century) mentions fifteen trade routes starting from important places in north India and Idrisi (twelfth century) speaks of Broach as a port of call for vessels coming from China and Sindh. The rise of the Cholas Chalukyas, Chandellas, Chahamanas, Paramaras, Chaulukyas (also known as Solankis) and Gahadavalas also created conditions for trade and for

coined money. But trade itself was feudalized because the state income from traders and craftsmen was transferred to religious institutions and officials. The process of feudalization thus went on unabated As a result the class of landed intermediaries, which included a large number of temples and religious establishments, continued to remain firmly saddled in a position of power and authority.

Decline of trade and towns in the pre-tenth century period gave a spurt to agrarian expansion. Brahmanas migrated from the decayed towns to villages and backward areas where they carried their advanced knowledge of agriculture. Artisans deserted the towns to settle in rural areas where they disseminated their technological know-how. A major development in agricultural technology was the use of the Persian wheel (*arahatta/araghatta/ghaliyantra*) which is known from the sixth-seventh century sources. It became popular in Rajasthan from the ninth century and spread in other parts of north India though its developed form came into vogue centuries later. Similarly, the use of tanks for irrigation in south India from the time of the Pallavas became fairly common. Knowledge about crops seems to have increased and one text mentions as many as seventeen types of grain. Many new crops, including cash crops, were grown in different parts of the country. Agricultural expansion and urban contraction, thus, went hand in hand throughout the early medieval period.

Amidst these changes the position of the landed magnates remained unaffected because they enjoyed land in perpetuity. Occupying an intermediate position between the state and the common people, they increasingly subjected the latter to various forms of exploitation. The practice of subinfeudation became common and so became the practice of leasing out land to tenants. They could be easily evicted as is borne out by many inscriptions, especially from south India. The existence of ordinary peasants and tenants thus became uncertain and precarious. The number of taxes and dues to be realized from them increased. A Chola inscription mentions more than fifty dues and imposts, and the Hoysala records refer to much larger number of them. Levy of forced labour (*vishti*) became widespread in most parts of the country. In some north Indian records (e.g. those of the Paramaras, Chaulukyas, Chahamanas and Chandellas), it seems to have lost visibility from the eleventh century and in some areas (e.g. Kashmir) it could be commuted by a money payment. But the practice

of corvee did not die out; the Tamil Chola inscriptions provide as many as 107 references to *vitti*. Peasants, artisans and merchants were now increasingly transferred along with land to the donee. They had not only to obey their commands but had also to remain attached to the donated land. Restriction on their mobility became rigid and made their escape from misery difficult, if not impossible. The loss of mobility by peasants and artisans, in a sense, fortified the closed nature of village economy. Village customs (*gramadharma*) therefore became important and got precedence over district customs (*desha-dharma*) and fostered a strong sense of localism

Tension and cleavage between peasants and other ordinary inhabitants and their exploiters became inevitable in the feudal society. Evidence of agrarian unrest thus begins to be available from about the tenth century onwards. The formidable Kaivarta rebellion against the Pala kings Mahipala and Ramapala has been viewed as a manifestation of rural violence. Some of the revolts by the Damaras in Kashmir were also in the nature of peasant uprising. Similarly many instances of peasant protest are known from south India. Records from Tamilnadu refer to the loss of the brahmana villages (*brahmadeya*) in the wake of the Kalabhra aggression and to the encroachment upon donated villages by the shudras. In the reign of the Chola king Rajaraja III a riot took place when original records of land transfer were lost and the individual rights were determined on the basis of actual possession. The records of his dynasty speak of a dancing girl throwing herself from the temple tower and of the temple guards leaping into the flames of a fire to establish their right over the land assigned to them for maintenance, and of a brahmana who committed self-immolation to assert the rights of the temple servants. Protests, violent or peaceful, were indicative of the internal contradiction of feudal social formation in which the landed intermediaries of all categories, including temples and other religious establishments, ruled the roost.

The feudal ranks cut across *varna* considerations. An early medieval text on architecture classifies vassals and princes into nine categories in descending order, the lowest two being open to everybody irrespective of his caste. The higher sections of the landed aristocracy were invested with flywhisks, umbrellas, elephants, horses, and palanquins as marks of their social identity. In the Deccan the recipients

of land and villages received a badge of honour from their lord-benefactor and wore it on their forehead. The high-ranking feudal vassals even used five musical instruments (*panchamahashabda*), which was the privilege of the sovereign. Instances of artisans and merchants being given feudal titles are also known from the records. The head of the artisans of Varendri, for example, held the title *ranaka*. Similarly, titles like *thakura*, *raut*, and *nayaka* were given not only to Rajputs or kshatriyas but also to members of other castes who received grants of land and villages in lieu of administrative or military service. The title *thakura* has, therefore, survived till our own times among the brahmanas, Rajputs, and even barbers. The use of various symbols of social identity and military power and of titles indicating feudal ranks by the beneficiaries irrespective of their caste may have modified the traditional *varna* system.

Evidence of significant changes in the caste system is plentiful. The vaishyas, for example, ceased to remain important as a trading caste when trade languished, and a Puranic text tells us that in the *kali* age some traders would become oilmen and winnowers of grain, others would seek shelter with *rajputras*, and yet others with all *varnas*. The identity of the vaishyas as a peasant caste also seems to have been blurred. For the shudras now took their position as cultivators and the origin of the modern peasant castes of *kurmis* in Bihar and *kunbis* in Maharashtra may be traced back to the early medieval period. The gap between the vaishyas and the shudras was thus reduced; Al-Beruni tells us that members of both castes were punished by having their tongue cut off for reciting the Vedas.

The number of shudra castes swelled enormously. A post-Gupta Puranic text mentions more than a hundred mixed castes as against the 61 listed in the *Manusmriti*. Another Purana, assignable to the eighth century, states that thousands of mixed castes are produced as a result of unapproved relationships of vaishya women with members of the lower castes. An important reason for this increase was that guilds of artisans and craftsmen, which earlier flourished on account of brisk commercial activity, now ossified into shudra castes. Equally important was the fact that many tribes living in jungles and forests were conquered. Shabaras, Bhillas, Pulindas, Abhiras, and others were thus suppressed and were absorbed into the Brahmanical order. The brahmanas who settled in tribal areas after getting land grants brought the backward people into their social and cultural fold peacefully and

they assigned shudra status to most of them. The shudra castes were classified as pure (*sat*) and impure (*asat*). The latter category consisted mostly of the untouchable castes; more than fifty of them are enumerated in the early medieval sources. All beefeaters were now relegated to the rank of untouchables.

An increase in the number of brahmana sub-castes was, however, much more striking. The brahmanas were often named after the ritual they practised or the Vedic learning they cultivated. They were identified by their *gotras* (male ancestor's name) whose number increased; nearly two hundred of them are mentioned in the early medieval land records. Due to the growth of localism, they were often classified according to the region from which they had migrated to receive gifts of land. Some of the earliest references to such brahmana groups as Saraswat, Kanyakubja, Utkala, Maithila, and Gauda belong to the early tenth century. In Bengal, the two-fold classification of brahmanas into Radhi and Varendri was based on the two regions of Bengal. The tendency of localism was so strong that they came to be identified invariably by the village to which they originally belonged. Thus, the brahmanas of Radha came to be divided into 56 subcastes and those of Mithila into 180 on the basis of their original villages.

The phenomenon of proliferation was also striking among the kshatriyas or Rajputs. Already in the pre-Gupta period the Bactrian Greeks, Shakas and Parthians had been absorbed into the Brahmanical social order as second-class kshatriyas. Their ranks, however, swelled from the fifth and sixth centuries onwards with the influx of other Central Asian peoples like the Hunas, Gujars, and perhaps the Chahamanas, Tomars, and Solankis, etc., all of them founded kingdoms and claimed respectable genealogies. The Rajputs, who were a significant factor in the early medieval social polity, were divided not only into superior and inferior groups but also into thirty-six clans. In addition to the proliferation and fragmentation of the existing castes, there is also evidence of the emergence of new groups of scribes; their services were needed on account of frequent land transfers as a result of donations, partitions of property, and subinfeudation, etc. Known variously as *karana*, *karanika*, *adhikrita*, *pustapala*, *chitragupta*, *lekhaka*, *divira*, *dharmalekhin*, *akshapatalika*, *kayastha*, etc., they came to be grouped together as the kayastha caste. As a new literati class, the kayasthas undermined the position of the brahmanas who seldom

portrayed them in a favourable light; Kalhana, in fact, refers to them as worse than poisoned arrows. In the countryside there also emerged a class of village elders and headmen which initially cut across traditional *varna* lines but in course of time split into castes having different ritual status. They were often referred to as *mahattara* in north India, as *pattakila* in western India, and as *gavundas* in Karnataka, being the precursors of the modern *mahato*, *patel*, and *gauda* respectively.

The caste system did not become weak as a result of changes. On the contrary, it became much more rigid than before and its ideology strengthened the patriarchal family and its control over feudal property. Law books now laid much emphasis on the royal charter as the proof of ownership of land as against the earlier idea of mere prolonged possession and recognized the reality of subinfeudation. The eldest son inherited the estates, the younger ones being entitled to some maintenance, and daughters having a right only to their *stridhana*. According to the *dayabhaga* system of inheritance, expounded by Jimutavahana (not earlier than the eleventh century), widows enjoyed inheritance rights after the death of their husband. But this remained confined mainly to Bengal. In most parts of the country the views expressed by Vijnaneshvara (twelfth century) in his *Mitakshara* prevailed. Both schools of legal thought, however, favoured the integrity and maintenance of large landed estates and the patriarchal control over them.

In the patriarchal family structure women were subjected to an unprecedented degree of subordination. Deprived of the right to initiation and formal education, they were generally denied the right to property and they themselves continued to be treated as an item of property. The practice of the wife joining the husband on the funeral pyre (*anumarana/sahagamana/sahamarana*, *sati*), therefore, gained popularity, especially among the upper classes. Although a legal commentator considered *sati* an act of suicide, the Puranas propagated stories of women who burnt themselves with their husbands and secured a place in heaven as a reward. Literary and epigraphic evidence indicates the prevalence of *sati* in several parts of northern India, though its evidence is also available from the peninsular region. In Rajasthan, the militant Rajput kings and nobles expected a high degree of fidelity and loyalty from their wives and servants who, therefore, followed them in death. In Bengal, where the Rajputs were

not numerous, the practice of widow burning prevailed among the brahmanas despite the legal injunction to the contrary. It is likely that the ideology behind *sati* was used here to deprive them of their share in landed property that came to be concentrated in the hands of mostly brahamana landlords.

The growth of a heirarchized land owning leisured class topped by the chief or the king articulated itself through its patronage of art, religion, and literature. Kalhana provides interesting references to the construction of temples by the kings and members of the royal family of Kashmir. Lalitaditya (699-736) built the Martand temple at Hushkapura (Ushkar) and his wives and ministers consecrated hundreds of images of Vishnu and Shiva. In the Gujarat-Rajasthan region the temples at Somanatha and Mount Abu were built by the Chaulukyas (Solankis) and in Orissa those at Jagannatha and Konarak by the Gangas. At Khajuraho in central India, the Chandella kings built the major temples like those of Lakshmana (954), Vishvanatha (1002), and Kandariya Mahadeva (*c.* 1050). Their Jaina ministers also supported the construction of several religious establishments of their faith; one Kokkala of a landowning family is said to have built a temple in 1001. In the Deccan, the remains at Badami and Aihole bear testimony to the interest of the Chalukyas in the temple construction just as those at Halebid and Belur tell us of Hoysala patronage to it. In Tamilnadu, the Pallavas began the practice of constructing cave temples, though the best specimens of free standing temples during their rule are seen in the Shore temple at Mahabalipuram and the Kailashanath temple at Kanchipuram, both belonging to the eighth century. More than the Pallavas, however, the Cholas spent their resources on temple building. The Rajarajeshwara temple at Tanjore built by Rajaraja I (985-1016?) and the Brihadeshvara temple at Gongaikondacholapuram erected by his successor Rajendra (1012-44?) are the most impressive and monumental structures of south India. Construction of and support to temples by kings and feudal lords was common throughout the country, and the early medieval Indian landscape was covered with large numbers of them, some being unrivalled in elegance and grandeur. In a sense, therefore, temple architecture entered a new phase of development.

Gods lived lavishly in their sacred precincts. Staff in their service sometimes became very large, and rituals in their honour amazingly

Plate 28: Shore temples at Mahabalipuram, Pallava, eighth century.

elaborate and complex. The divine fascination for wealth was accompanied by a divine weakness for women. Like kings, the gods also came to have dancing girls. Our sources make copious references to the women associated with the temple, which resembled the royal palace along with its seraglio. A seventh-century record from Rajasthan refers to a *ganika* (courtesan) associated with a temple and an eighth-century document from Orissa to *darikas* (female servants). Kalhana and other writers of the age make frequent references to temple women (*devadasis*). Three hundred female dancers, an Arab account tells us, danced at the gate of the Somanatha temple. In the Chahamana kingdom a number of them were attached to every temple. The existence of temple dancers was not uncommon in Buddhist temples in Orissa and Jain religious establishments in Gujarat. According to a twelfth-century writer, they made a travesty of temple worship. The term *vilasini* occurring in the seventh-eighth-century inscriptions in

Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka has been interpreted to mean charming or coquettish temple women and, in Kerala, inscriptions refer to them as *nankaimar* (ladies) from the late ninth century onwards. The Chola records, however, make most frequent references to them; four hundred women were associated with the Great Temple at Tanjore. The temple women contributed significantly to the development of the performing arts, including various dance forms like the *bharatanatyam*. They increased in number over time, and continued to exist as a distinct social group, especially in south India whereas recently as 1800 they numbered 100 in the temple at Kanchipuram.

Temples and other religious establishments as well as educational centres attached to them became storehouses of fabulous wealth through an ever-increasing number of gifts and donations by kings and their feudatories. The Chola king Rajaraja I alone presented to the great Tanjore temple golden articles weighing 41,557 *kalanju* or nearly 484 lbs and jewels worth 10,000 *pon*, equal to as many *kalanju* in gold; all this was in addition to the gift of 57 villages. The temple of Somanatha, enjoyed the revenues of 10,000 villages. Similarly, the educational centres at Nalanda and Valabhi enjoyed the revenues of 200 villages each. Examples of this kind can be multiplied to any extent.

The temples and religious centres attracted both Indian rulers and foreign invaders. In Kashmir several kings seized the wealth of gods. Shankaravarman (883-902) is said to have plundered sixty-four temples. King Kalasha (1063-89) destroyed the image of Surya and took away images from the Buddhist monastic establishments. King Harshadeva (1089-1101), we are told, appointed an officer (*devotpatananayaka*) to supervise the looting of temples and destruction of images in them. Pillaging of temples was no doubt motivated by kingly avarice, but instances of kings bringing temple property as trophies of war are not unknown. The Pandyan kings seized the golden image of the Buddha from Anuradhapura (Sri Lanka) in the ninth century and the Chola king Rajadhiraja (1018-54) brought the image of a door guardian of a temple from Kalyana in the eleventh, much as Mahmud of Ghazni, according to the British accounts, transported the wooden gates of Somanatha to Ghazni. Looting was, it has rightly been observed, an important element in the rhetoric of kingship, and temples, being repositories of wealth, became the most sought after military target.

Plate 29: Danseuse, Western Chalukya, twelfth century.

Early medieval temple architecture followed the general pattern of differentiation in which landed magnates were graded in a system of subinfeudation. A religious text prescribes seven graded structures of the temple, presumably meant for gods, goddesses and their attendants. The construction of *panchayatana* temple complexes (central shrine surrounded by four subsidiary ones), beginning from the Gupta period, became popular from the ninth century and reflected the feudal ranks prevalent in society. These ranks found their echo in the sculptural representation of deities. Vishnu, Shiva and Durga were the dominant deities and had their own pantheons. They dominated over many other divinities that were placed as retainers and attendants in smaller sizes in temples. Similarly, the Buddhist and Jaina pantheons replicated the pyramidal structure of the feudal polity. The idea of hierarchy also influenced the organization of temples and Buddhist and Jaina monasteries.

All these developments went on apace with fundamental changes in the doctrines and rituals of Indian religions. The doctrine of *bhakti*, which was already gaining ground in the Gupta period, now struck much deeper roots. It became an integral feature of medieval religion, especially in south India where its protagonists were Shaiva and Vaishnava saints, known as Nayanars and Alwars respectively. The *bhakti* tradition played down the *varna* system and accepted members from all castes within its fold; in a sense it shared the egalitarianism of Islam which entered India in the early medieval period. Most of the 63 Nayanars were non-brahmana. This does not, however, mean that *bhakti* repudiated the caste system. A Puranic text in fact tells us that a man who bows down to a *linga* or Vishnu touched by a shudra is doomed forever. Similarly a twelfth-century Tamil Vaishnava text quotes the saint Nammalvar as saying that none but a learned brahmana can approach the sanctum and touch the feet of the lord. Despite this elitism seen in the liturgical literature, there is no doubt that the idea of *bhakti* exercised an overriding influence on popular consciousness in early medieval India. Even the great philosopher and theologian Shankara (ninth century), a Namboodiri brahmana from Kaladi (Kerala), with all his emphasis on unqualified monism and the Upanishadic idea of salvation through knowledge, accommodated the *bhakti* doctrine in his philosophy. He himself was a devotee of Shiva and is credited with the authorship of some fine devotional

poems, including the *Anandalahari* in praise of Parvati. Later, Ramanuja (1017-1137), a Tamil brahmana of Vaishnava persuasion, and an ardent exponent of qualified monism, laid greater emphasis on *bhakti* as a means to achieve salvation. Devotionalism was thus the most popular ideology and found its way even in the abstract philosophies of contemporary thinkers.

The *bhakti* doctrine strengthened the theory of incarnation. Originally a feature mainly of Vaishnavism, it now influenced other religions as well. An early medieval Puranic text thus mentions twenty-eight *avataras* of Shiva. Most of these are imitations of Vishnu incarnations, though the last of these, Lakulisha/Nakulisha, became important. In Jainism the worship of *tirthankaras* became popular. In Vaishnavism itself, the boar (*varaha*) form of Vishnu, seems to have become very common, though the ten *avataras* of Vishnu came to be standardized and are mentioned in a late seventh century inscription from Mahabalipuram. Rama as an incarnation of Vishnu was known but as a cult deity he could not achieve the stature of Krishna. The scenes from the life of the latter were represented in several temples and Jayadeva and Nimbarka popularized his worship in the twelfth century. But in our own times both Rama and Krishna have been made instruments of political mobilization.

The most common manifestation of *bhakti* was *puja*, which, in a sense, was a replica of the feudal practice of offering land and property and other services to the lord and receiving back, in return, land, fiscal rights, and protection as favour (*prasada*). It encouraged the construction of temples on a large scale by kings and landed magnates. Unlike the Vedic gods who did not have any abode on earth, Indian gods now lived in temples with the full panoply of a king or a feudal lord. The idea of holy places (*tirtha* or *tirthayatra*) as places of divine residence gripped the masses and the practice of visiting them gained unprecedented popularity. Out of the estimated 2,000 *tirthas* in India a large number may be traced back to the early medieval period. Many of them were ancient towns in decay and some of them (Prayag, Kashi, Prithudaka, Amarakantaka, etc.) were holy enough to secure salvation in return for suicide. Hsüan Tsang (seventh century) speaks of the practice of committing suicide by leaping off the high sacred banyan tree near the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna at Prayag. Several centuries later the Chandella ruler Dhanga

(AD 1000) and Gangeyadeva of the Chedi dynasty (AD 1073) committed suicide at Prayag. Al-Beruni (eleventh century) states that anchorites went to Varanasi to live up to the end of their lives—a practice which has remained popular also among the aged and the widows till our own times. The practice of religious suicide, already prevalent among the Jainas, now came into wide vogue among them and Sravana Belgola (Karnataka) was one of the favourite sacred places where they starved themselves to death. Voluntary termination of life at haloed places became an important feature of religion in early feudal India, though famished Indian farmers of today are free to commit suicide wherever they are.

The practices of *bhakti*, *puja*, and *tirthayatra* occupied a place of prominence in the Puranic texts whose number multiplied during early medieval times. Being open to members of all *varnas* they achieved universal appeal and became important ingredients of all medieval religions, especially Tantricism, the most influential of them all. Tantricism originated in the tribal and backward areas where brahmana settlements came up as a result of land donations and facilitated their absorption by the Sanskritic tradition. The brahmana beneficiaries interacted with the local people and, in the process, appropriated their deities, especially the female ones. In Bengal, Manasa found her way into Brahmanical religious system during the early phase of the Pala rule. In Orissa, Maninageshvari was elevated to a place of importance in the fifth-sixth century through royal donations; human sacrifices were made to her till recently. In the same region, Stambheshvari, a goddess associated with the ancient Shaulika tribe, was absorbed into the Brahmanical tradition during the sixth-eighth century through the patronage of the Sulki rulers. In Tamilnadu the goddess Minaksi (fish-eyed) was similarly brought into the Brahmanical fold through the patronage of the Pandya rulers. At Tirupati (Andhra Pradesh) the goddess Padmavati, who has Tantric affiliations, became important in the eighth century when a temple was built to her. Almost all the temples of sixty-four *yoginis* (mother goddess in sixty-four forms) were built in the tribal belt of eastern Madhya Pradesh and Orissa during early medieval times. Several other tribal deities with strange sounding names (e.g. Ghasmari, Shavari, Chandali, Dombini, etc.) were integrated into the Tantric Brahmanical tradition through interaction with the tribal people. Not surprisingly

several extant Tantric texts have unquestionable tribal affiliation (e.g. *Yoginitantra*, *Matangaparameshvaratantra*, *Vajrayoginisadhana*, etc.). Inclusion of tribal cults and deities not only consolidated Brahmanical cultural hegemony outside mid-India but also led to a demographic explosion in the world of divinity, giving rise to the later hyperbolic statement about India having 330 million gods.

Although the cult of the mother goddess existed even in the earlier period, it became central to Tantricism. Unlike the traditional Brahmanical religion, it did not ignore women. A Tantric text tells us that a woman is born in the family (*kula*) of the Great Mother and so one should not beat her even with a flower. Tantricism not only allowed the initiation of women but also permitted them to become preceptors (*gurus*); a late text even discusses a female *guru's* qualifications. The Tantric attitude to women also found its echo in the materialist philosophy of the Charvakas who resented the subjection of women. But all this does not mean that the position of women improved in early medieval times; for according to the dominant orthodox view women took undue liberty under the influence of Tantricism.

In its popular forms Tantricism laid down magical rites and rituals meant for the achievement of liberation (*mukti*) and enjoyment (*kamyani*) and for warding off diseases and the effects of usual mishaps like snakebite, mouse bite, etc. All this strengthened the practice of witchcraft or black magic and perhaps gave a stimulus to the growth of astrology and divination on which several important works were written during the early medieval period. Kalyanavarma wrote his *Saravali* in the ninth century and Bhattotpala produced his commentary on Varahamihira in the tenth. Kings Ballalasena and Lakshmanasena composed their *Adbhutasagar* on omens and prognostications in the twelfth century, to which period also belong Durlabharaja's *Samudra-tilaka* on the same theme and his son Jagaddeva's *Svapanachintamani*, a work on dream lore. More or less at the same time Narahari wrote his *Narapatijayacharyasvarodaya*, which describes how the results of war and other adventures can be prognosticated with the help of diagrams. Astrology and divination, thus, became 'an important factor in the mental make-up of the common people' and this had much to do with the spread of popular Tantricism.

Tantricism emerged as a strong religious force and permeated all contemporary religions. Although Buddhism declined in north-western

India in the wake of the Arab invasions, it developed into three schools, Vajrayana, Kalachakrayana, and Sahajayana, all of them being predominantly Tantric in theory and practice. The *Guhyasamajatantra*, *Hevajratantra*, *Sadhanamala*, *Kalachakratantra*, and *Dakarnava* are the most important Buddhist Tantric texts of the period, and Tara the most celebrated female deity of the Buddhists. So prominent became the occult and left-handed Tantric practices in Buddhism that in a twelfth-century farce a Buddhist monk is called Vyasnakara (mine of vices). Many Tantric beliefs and practices found their way into Jainism which flourished in Rajasthan and Gujarat, and Karnataka from where it spread to other parts of southern India. Jvalamalini, Padmavati, and Ambika were important Jain female deities and the texts devoted to them (e.g. *Jvalinikalpa* and *Bhairavapadmavatikalpa*) are the significant Jaina contributions to the vast body of Tantric literature. Shaivism also developed marked Tantric traits. The followers of its important sects—Kapalikas, Kalamukhas and Kaulas—indulged in wild and fantastic practices. The Kaulas are, in fact, described in a text as avowed sensualists as well as worshippers of Shiva. The extreme character of Shaivism is attested by Hsüan Tsang. The Chinese Buddhist pilgrim, we are told, was about to be immolated before an image of Durga, the consort of Shiva, when a sudden miraculous storm made his escape possible.

Although Tantricism, like *bhakti,* was an important component of most of the medieval religions, their votaries did not always practice tolerance. On the contrary, instances of sectarian rivalry and violence are many in early medieval India. In Kashmir, Hsuan Tsang tells us, the Huna chief Mihirakula, a Shaiva by faith, destroyed 1,600 Buddhist establishments and killed thousands of Buddhist monks and lay followers; several centuries later kings Kshemagupta (950-68) and Kalasha (1063-89) are said to have destroyed Buddhist images and monasteries. In Tamilnadu, the Pandyan king, who gave up Jainism to embrace Shaivism, is said to have impaled eight thousand Jainas. In Karnataka, the followers of Jainism were a perpetual *bete noire* to the followers of the anti-Brahmanical Shaivite sect of Lingayats founded by Basava in the twelfth century. Instances of sectarian violence between the two are well documented, though much of it may have been rooted in the economic rivalry between them in an era of commercial revival. The harassment of Jainas by the Lingayats became

so acute later that they had to appeal to the Vijaynagara ruler for protection. The much trumpeted 'tolerance' of Hinduism has, therefore, to be taken with a pinch of salt, but there is no doubt that Tantric beliefs and practices and *bhakti* were shared in varying degrees by all religions.

Popular Tantricism emphasized orgiastic rites involving addiction to the five *makaras*—*matsya* (fish), *mamsa* (meat), *madya* (intoxicating drink), *maithuna* (sex), and *mudra* (physical gesture). It introduced a strong element of eroticism in the arts. Erotic depictions, for example, are noticeable in the temples of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan (e.g. Bavka, Motap, Sunak, Galteshvara, Dabhoi, Eklingaji, Nagda, etc.), Orissa (Bhuvaneshvara), Karnataka (Halebid, Begali, and Belur) and Tamilnadu (Madura and Kanchipuram). But these portrayals are most prominent in Konarak and Khajuraho. The widespread influence of Tantric cults and their erotic elements on the artistic idiom and motifs is thus unquestionable. Patronage of high spiritualism symbolized by grandiose temple structures and of the extreme sensuality seen in their sculptural ornamentation came from the feudal landed aristocracy headed by the rulers themselves, whose ideology was a curious mix of the sacred and the profane.

The feudal lords and the ruling class also extended generous patronage to the authors of erotic texts which were composed in good number in early medieval times, though the first systematic enunciation of Kamashastra is found in the *Kamasutra* of Vatsyayana who belongs to the fourth-fifth centuries. Damodaragupta (AD 779-813), whose *Kuttanimatam* shows officers' sons, feudal princes, and religious *acharyas* as the paramours of courtesans, was the chief minister of the Kashmirian king Jayapida. Kshemendra (eleventh century), author of the *Samayamatrika* and *Kalavilasa*, wrote for another Kashmirian king Ananta. Kakkoka (twelfth century) addressed his *Ratirahasya* to a king. Clearly then the steady patronage for erotic literature came from the rulers or their protégés as it came for temples and monasteries.

Sex and religion went together in courtly circles. The former topped the agenda of the poet who sang paeans of his patron and pleased him by sensuous descriptions. Erotics, in fact, occupied such a prominent place in literature that Bhartrihari, even in his *Vairagyashataka* devoted to the renunciation of the pleasure of senses, seems to be

Plate 30: Young girl writing a love letter. Khajuraho, Chandella, eleventh century.

Plate 31: Belle with mirror. Hoysala, twelfth century. Kesava Temple, Belur.

displaying, as it were, a lustful longing for the ripe breasts and thighs of a beautiful woman and her devastating glances. Similarly, in Vidyakara's *Subhashitaratnakosha* (twelfth century), an anthology of stanzas from more than two hundred sources and hence a representative of the classical Sanskrit poetic tradition, the dominant theme remains the sensual, erotic, often sybaritic, experience of men and women as well as of gods and goddesses.

With the emergence of the feudal hierarchy characterized by the court style, the Sanskrit language developed new literary genres like drama, epic, lyric poetry, biography, and novel, etc. More importantly, there took place a remarkable change in its flavour so that the real idea to be conveyed by the author was concealed beneath the verbiage of metaphors, imageries, adjectives, and complicated adverbs. Bana's prose provides a typical example of stylistic pleonasm. In poetry, many metres were invented and according to one view as many as seventy-eight syllabic metres were used in classical Sanskrit poetry.

Besides prosody, poetics received much attention during early medieval times. Already Bharata in his *Natyashastra* had laid its foundations. Now several authors wrote on poetics. Bhamaha in his *Kavyalamkara* (seventh-eighth centuries) defined different aspects of poetics and expounded the doctrine of *alamkara* (ornamentation); Udbhata (AD 779-813) and Rudrata (AD 900-1200) also dealt with the theme in considerable detail. Dandin (seventh century?) in his *Kavyadarsha* and Vamana (eighth-ninth centuries) in his *Kavipriya* enunciated new ideas of poetics. Anandavardhana (ninth century), the author of the *Dhvanyaloka*, became the chief exponent of the *dhvani* (reverberation) school. This influenced the *rasa* (flavour) theory as developed by Abhinavagupta (tenth century) in his *Abhinavabharati* and *Kavyaloka*. Mammata (eleventh-twelfth centuries) in his *Kavyaprakasha* summarized with remarkable conciseness the various earlier ideas and theories of poetics, his work becoming the basis of several exegetical exercises in subsequent times. There was thus an unprecedented development of poetics as a discipline. This coincided with the growth of lexicography. More than half a dozen well-known dictionaries of homonyms and synonyms belong to the time bracket of AD 600-1200.

Excessive attention to prosody, poetics, and lexicography tended to make the Sanskrit language complicated, florid, pedantic, and prolix.

Double entendre became a prominent feature of the *kavya* literature. The composing of a Sanskrit stanza implied a 'mind and memory not otherwise preoccupied, ample leisure to work out its double and triple meanings, mythological allusions, complicated figures of speech—apart from the long training needed to write even the simplest bit of Sanskrit'. Several texts thus devote sections to the training of the poet (*kavisikhsa*) as well as to the art of flattery (*chatupravarjya*), the combination of the two being a convenient ladder to material success and prosperity. Sanskrit thus became the exclusive preserve of the royal court, the feudal aristocracy, and the elite. With its impenetrable verbosity classical Sanskrit became the language of political power and cultural domination. It widened the chasm between landlords and peasants and fortified the former's ideological and cultural hegemony over other segments of society. But the vital literary energies were gradually channellized into regional languages. Sanskrit naturally tended to lose its hegemonic position. Not surprisingly it came to be described as a dead language by the mid-nineteenth-century Gujarati poet, Dalpatram Dahyani, though around this time it also began to be 'utilized as one of the major legitimizing sources of Indian national identity constructed as Hindu identity'.

Bibliography

GENERAL

Several scholars have written general surveys of early Indian history before and after Independence. Among the pre-Independence works the most well known is V.A. Smith, *Early History of India* (4th edn, revd by M. Edwardes, Oxford, 1924) which suffers from a pronounced imperialist bias and is no longer popular. After Independence many scholars have attempted to present overviews of major historical developments in early India. Among the works providing an insightful all-round survey of developments based on a critical appraisal of original sources with an emphasis on social and economic history, D.D. Kosambi's writings remain unsurpassed. His *Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (Bombay, 1957) and *Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline* (London, 1965) present a radical perception of India's past and his methodology and approach based on a combination of literary, archaeological, and ethnographical material have given a new direction to modern writings on Indian history. There is much in common between him and R.S. Sharma whose scientific analysis of social, economic, and political developments has significantly influenced the recent historiography of ancient India. Reference to his specialized works will be made at appropriate places but suffice it to mention here that his *Ancient India* (Delhi, 1977) has gone a long way in demystifying India's early history. Romila Thapar presents a lucid account of historical developments in her *History of India*, vol. I (Harmondsworth, 1966) which, however, covers a much larger chronological segment than is covered by us here; her *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*, Allen Lane, London, 2002, however, deals more or less with the period covered in the present volume. K.A. Antanova et al. (*A History of India*, 2 vols., Moscow, 1979), Hermann Kulke and D. Rothermund (*A History of India*, Delhi,

1986) and John Keay (*India: A History*, New York, 2000) deal with all periods of Indian history and the early phase of India's history occupies much less space than one would expect, though the last named book is highly readable and often quite illuminating. Hemchandra Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India* (1st edn, Calcutta, 1927; 7th edn, Calcutta, 1970; revd edn with commentary by B.N. Mukherjee, New Delhi, 1996) remains the most authoritative account of the political/dynastic history up to the Gupta period. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri's *A History of South India* (Oxford, 1955, 2nd edn, 1958) is an equally important work dealing with the political and cultural history of peninsular India. The first five volumes of R.C. Majumdar et al., ed., *The History and Culture of the Indian People* (Bombay, 1951ff) are as informative as they are revivalist and Hindu chauvinist in approach.

In addition to these general works, there are many studies which deal with different aspects of early Indian history and culture. A.L. Basham's *The Wonder That Was India* (London, 1954, 3rd revd edn, 1967) deals with almost every aspect of early Indian culture and his *The Origins and Development of Classical Hinduism*, New Delhi, 1990, is a concise account of the various facets of Hinduism. *A Cultural History of India* edited by Basham and published from Oxford in 1975 is an anthology of articles contributed by specialists in the different branches of Indology and may be used with profit. Apart from these, an impressive bulk of literature has appeared on specific themes of early Indian history. References to the relevant studies have been made in the chapter-wise bibliographies, and only a few of them are listed below:

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

S.N. Mukherjee, *Sir William Jones: A Study in Eighteenth-Century British Attitudes tb India*, London, 1968, and O.P. Kejariwal, *The Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Discovery of India's Past*, New Delhi, 1988, analyse early historical writings on ancient India. A similar exercise has been undertaken recently by Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India 1600-1800*, Delhi, 1995.

For a discussion of the imperialist and nationalist attitudes to the Indian past see R.S. Sharma, *Aspects of Ancient Indian Political Ideas and Institutions*, Delhi, 1959, Chap 1; idem, 'Historiography of the Ancient Indian Social Order', in C.H. Philips, ed., *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, London, 1961. This volume also contains articles by C.H. Philips and A.L. Basham who have evaluated the works of James Mill, Mountstuart Elphinstone, and Vincent A. Smith. Romila Thapar, *The Past and Prejudice*, New Delhi, 1975, identifies major trends in the historical writings on ancient India. S.P. Sen, ed., *Historians and Historiography in Modern India*, Calcutta, 1973, contains articles on several Indian historians who wrote during the colonial period. D.D. Kosambi's historical writings were first evaluated by D.N. Jha ('A Marxist View of Ancient Indian History', in Mohit Sen, ed., *Das Kapital Centenary Volume*, Delhi, 1967, and 'D.D. Kosambi', in S.P. Sen, op. cit.). For subsequent assessments see: Dale Riepe ('D.D. Kosambi: Father of Indian Scientific History', in R.S. Sharma, ed., *Indian Society: Historical Probings*, Delhi, 1974); Romila Thapar, *Interpreting Early India*, Delhi, 1992. For a discussion of Marxist influence on the historiography of early India see Brendan O'Leary, *The Asiatic Mode of Production: Oriental Despotism, Historical Materialism and Indian History*, Basil

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CHAPTER 2: FROM PREHISTORY TO CIVILIZATION

The urban features of the Harappan civilization have been the focus of scholarly writings since its discovery in the 1920s as is evident from the works of E.J.H. Mackay ('Excavations of Mohenjodaro', *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India*, 1928-9; *Further Excavations at Mohenjodaro*, Govt. of India, Delhi, 1938; *Chanhu-Daro Excavations*, 1935-6, New Haven, 1943), John Marshall (*Mohenjodaro and the Indus Civilisation*, London, 1931) and M.S. Vats (*Excavations at Harappa*, Govt. of India Press, Delhi, 1940). Even subsequently when Indian archaeology made good progress largely due to the efforts of Mortimer Wheeler, the emphasis on Harappan urbanism continued as is evident from his own works (*The Indus Civilisation*, Cambridge, 1953; *Early India and Pakistan*, London, 1958; *Civilisations of the Indus Valley and Beyond*, London, 1966) which remain popular readings, though Stuart Piggot (*Prehistoric India to 1000 BC*, London, 1950) and D.H. Gordon (*Prehistoric Background of Indian Culture*, Bombay, 1958) take into account much non-Harappan material. In recent years studies of both urban and rural settlements in India and Pakistan have enabled scholars to present a balanced view of Harappan and other chalcolithic cultures of the subcontinent. During the last twenty-five years or so many important studies dealing with Indian prehistory and protohistory have appeared and have considerably modified our earlier understanding. D.P. Agrawal has sought to integrate data from Harappan and non-Harappan chalcolithic sites taking into account the ecological and technological factors in his *Copper Bronze Age in India*, Delhi, 1971 and has provided an overview of the archaeological material

from a large number of pre-Harappan and Harappan sites in *The Archaeology of India*, London, 1982. H.D. Sankalia, *The Prehistory and Protohistory of India and Pakistan* (2nd edn, Poona, 1974) may be used as a compendium of information available from different prehistoric and protohistoric sites of the country, though a non-specialist reader may find Irfan Habib's *People's History of India*, vol. I, *Prehistory*, Delhi, 2001 easy to read. The writings of G.L. Possehl (*Ancient Cities of the Indus*, Delhi, 1979 and *The Harappan Civilisation: A Recent Perspective*, Delhi, 1993 edited by him) are useful for a broader understanding of the Harappan culture and those of Shereen Ratnagar (*Encounters: The Westerly Trade of the Harappan Civilisation*, Delhi, 1981; *Enquiries into the Political Organisation of the Harappan Society*, Pune, 1991; *Understanding Harappa: Civilisation in the Greater Indus Valley*, Delhi, 2001) throw light on Harappan trade and political organization and related issues. F.R. and B. Allchin, *Origins of a Civilisation: The Prehistory and Early Archaeology of South Asia*, New Delhi, 1997, makes a refreshing reading without providing any new insights and J.M. Kenoyer ['The Indus Valley Tradition of Pakistan and Western India', *Journal of World Prehistory*, vol. V, no. 4 (1991), *Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilisation*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1998] presents an account of major developments in Harappan archaeology and discusses the environmental setting and other aspects of the Harappan civilization. An up to date, concise, and insightful reconstruction of the Harappan and post-Harappan cultures by B.K. Thapar, M. Rafique Mughal, and Abdul Rahman can be found in A.H. Dani and J.-P. Mohen (eds.), *History of Humanity*, vol. II, UNESCO, Paris/London, 1996. Two recent publications (S. Ratnagar, *The End of the Great Harappan Tradition*, Delhi, 2000, and Nayanjot Lahiri (ed.), *The Decline and Fall of the Indus Civilization*, Delhi, 2000) are stimulating readings dealing with the collapse of the Harappan civilization, though their perspectives are different.

CHAPTER 3: THE VEDIC LIFE

Evidence on the history of the Aryans in India is available in the various categories of Vedic literature. The most relevant Vedic texts are: *The Hymns of the Rig-Veda*, trans. R.T.H. Griffiths (Varanasi, 1896-7), *Aitareya Brahmana*, trans. A.B. Keith (Harvard Oriental Series,

vol. XXV, Cambridge, Mass., 1920), *Shatapatha Brahmana*, trans. J. Eggeling (Oxford, 1882-1900), *Taittiriya Brahmana*, ed. R.L. Mitra (Calcutta, 1855-70), *Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, trans. F. Max Muller (Oxford, 1921), *The Grihyasutras*, trans. H. Oldenberg (Indian rpt, Delhi, 1967), and the *Dharmasutras*, trans. G. Buhler, *Sacred Books of the East*, vols. II. and XIV (Indian rpt, Delhi, 1965). J. Gonda (*The Vedic Literature*, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1975) gives a good idea of the contents of the corpus of Vedic literature; and Vibha Tripathi (*The Painted Grey Ware: An Iron Age Culture of Northern India*, Delhi, 1975) provides an analysis of the archaeological evidence bearing on the later Vedic period.

The archaeological material bearing on the Indo-Aryan homeland and the spread of the Aryan tribes was discussed by V. Gordon Childe in *The Aryans: A Study of Indo-European Origins* (London, 1926) and *New Light on the Most Ancient East* (London, 1952). In recent years, however, much literature has appeared on the Aryan problem. Some of the important and relevant writings are: G.M. Bongard-Levin, *The Origin of the Aryans: From Scythis to India*, New Delhi, 1980; Colin Renfrew, *Archaeology and Language: The Puzzle of Indo-European Origins*, London, 1987; J. Harmatta, 'Proto-Iranians and Proto-Indians in Central Asia in the Second Millennium BC', in B.A. Litvinsky, M.S. Asimov, et al., eds., *Ethnic Problems in the History of Central Asia in the Early Period*, Moscow, 1981; idem, 'The Emergence of the Indo-Iranians: The Indo-Iranian Languages', in A.H. Dani and V.M. Masson, eds., *History of Civilisations of Central Asia,* UNESCO, 1992; J.P. Mallory, *In Search of the Indo-Europeans: Language, Archaeology and Myth*, London, 1989. G. Erdozy, ed., *The Indo-Aryans of Ancient South Asia: Language, Material Culture and Ethnicity* (Berlin, 1995; 1st Indian edn, Delhi, 1997) brings together papers making a case for an interdisciplinary approach to the Aryan problem, though a few of them seem to throw red herrings across the path of historical analysis. For convincing arguments in favour of the coming of the Aryans from outside India see: R.S. Sharma, *Looking for the Aryans*, Madras, 1995; idem, *Advent of the Aryans in India*, Delhi, 1999; idem, 'Rg Vedic and Harappan Cultures: Lexical and Archaeological Aspects', *Social Scientist*, vol. 30, nos. 7-8 (July-August 2002). For a discussion of the development of the idea of the Aryan race see: L. Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth: A history of racist and nationalist ideas in Europe*, trans. Edmund Howard, London, 1974.

The use of the concept of the Aryan race in the Indian context has been dealt with by Joan Leopold ('The Aryan Theory of Race', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. VII, no. 1970; idem, 'British Applications of the Aryan Theory of Race to India', *English Historical Review*, vol. LXXXIX, 1974), Thomas R. Trautmann (*Aryans and British India*, New Delhi, 1997) and Romila Thapar, 'The Theory of the Aryan Race and India: History and Politics', *Transactions of the International Conference of Eastern Studies*, Tokyo, vol. XL, 1995). Peter Robb, ed., *The Concept of Race in South India*, New Delhi, 1995, is an anthology of articles providing a useful background to the debate centring around the Aryan race history.

Aspects of the Aryan life are described in the relevant sections of the *Cambridge History of India*, vol. I (1922). But a more recent and percipient analysis of material life, social differentiation, and the emergence of state on the basis of the Vedic texts, archaeological evidence, and field-work is available in R.S. Sharma, *Material Culture and Social Formation in Ancient India*, Delhi, 1985; idem, *The State and Varna Formation in the Mid-Ganga Plains: An Ethnoarchaeological View*, Delhi, 1996; idem, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, 3rd revd edn, Delhi, 1991; idem, *Origin of the State in India*, University of Bombay, 1989. Romila Thapar (*From Lineage to State: Social Formations in the Mid-first Millennium* BC, Delhi, 1984) studies the origins of the state from an anthropological point of view. For a different point of view see J.C. Heesterman, *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration Ceremony*, The Hague, 1957, and Jan Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View*, Leiden, 1969. D.D. Kosambi's articles ('Brahmin Clans', *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, New Series, vol. XXIII; 'On the Origin of the Brahmin Gotras', ibid., vol. XXVI) are essential readings for a rational understanding of the emergence of the brahmana groups in the Vedic period and R.S. Sharma discusses the origin of the shudras in *Shudras in Ancient India*, 2nd revd edn, Delhi, 1980. His *Perspectives in Social and Economic History of Early India*, 2nd revd edn, Delhi, 1995, is an insightful study of some of the social institutions from the Vedic period onwards. S.D. Singh, *Polyandry in Ancient India*, Delhi, 1978, investigates the meaning of marriage, looks at the importance of incest taboos, and presents a theoretical analysis of polyandry. On Vedic religion see: A.A. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, Strassbourg, 1897;

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CHAPTERS 4 AND 5: SOCIAL CHANGE AND RELIGIOUS DISSENT: JAINISM AND BUDDHISM, AND EARLY STATE FORMATION

The Buddhist, Jaina, and Brahmanical texts form the main bulk of the original sources relating to the events and developments discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. Evidence is also available from the Greek accounts. In addition, reports of archaeological excavations at many sites furnish significant information bearing on the historical processes and developments during the period *c.* 600-300 BC.

The important and relevant Buddhist texts are: *Anguttara Nikaya*, trans. F.L. Woodward (vols 1, 2, and 5) and E.M. Hare (vols 3 and 4), Pali Text Society, London, 1932; *Digha Nikaya*, trans. T.W. Rhys Davids and J.E. Carpenter, 3 vols, London, 1890-1911; *Majjhima Nikaya*, trans., Lord Chalmers, 2 vols, *Sacred Books of the Buddhists*, London, 1926-7; *Vinaya Pitaka*, trans. I.B. Horner, 5 pts, *Sacred Books of the Buddhists*, London, 1938-52; *Jataka*, trans. E.B. Cowell and others, 6 vols, London, 1895-1907. Among the Brahmanical sources mention may be made of the *Vishnu Purana* (trans. H.H. Wilson, London, 1864 and the *Bhagavat Purana* (trans. E. Bournouf, Paris, 1840-98). Though compiled much later, these Puranas contain considerable information bearing on this period. Also Panini's *Ashtadhyayi*, the first work on Sanskrit grammar (fifth century BC) is a useful primary source especially when studied in conjunction with other types of evidence. In the

category of Brahmanical texts the *Grihyasutras* (trans. G. Buhler, *Sacred Books of the East*, vols II and XIV, Indian rpt, Delhi, 1965) yield much information on social developments taking place in the age of the Buddha as well as in the earlier period. Relevant Jaina sources are available in the *Jaina Sutras* (trans. J. Jacobi, Oxford, 1884-5). Greek accounts of India have been translated by J.W. McCrindle in: *Ancient India as Described by Ktesias the Knidian* (Calcutta, 1882), *Ancient India as Described in Classical Literature* (Westminster, 1896). Herodotus's *History* (Oxford 1913-14) refers to north-western India. A substantial amount of data may be obtained from a large number of archaeological publications and excavation reports of which only a few are listed here: J. Marshall, *Taxila* (Cambridge, 1951); A. Ghosh, *Rajagriha* (5th edn., Delhi, 1958); G.R. Sharma, *Kaushambi* (Allahabad, 1960); A.S. Altekar and Vijayakanta Mishra, *Report on the Kumrahar Excavations 1951-55* (Patna, 1959); Suraj Bhan, *Excavations at Sugh (1964-65) Haryana*, reprinted from *Journal of Haryana Studies, Kurukshetra University*, vol. IX, nos 1-2 (1977); R.C. Gaur, *Excavations at Atranjikhera* (Delhi, 1983); A.K. Narain et al., *Excavations at Rajghat*, pts I-IV (Varanasi, 1976-8); B.P. Sinha and L.A. Narain, *Pataliputra Excavations 1955-56* (Patna, 1970); B.P. Sinha and Sita Ram Ray, *Excavations at Vaishali 1958-62* (Patna, 1968); B.P. Sinha and B.S. Varma, *Sonpur Excavations 1956 and 1959-62* (Patna, 1977); K.K. Sinha, *Excavations at Shravasti, 1959* (Varanasi, 1967); B.B. Lal, 'Excavations at Hastinapur . . .', *Ancient India*, nos. 10-11 (1954-5).

For the political history of the first territorial states (*mahajanapadas*) see H.C. Raychaudhuri, *Political Theory of Ancient India* (Delhi, 1996); Yogendra Mishra, *An Early History of Vaishali* (Delhi, 1962); idem, *History of Videha* (Patna, 1981). For Alexander's campaign Vincent Smith, *Early History of India* (Oxford, 1904) continues to be adequate. B.C. Law (*Some Kshatriya Tribes in Ancient India*, Calcutta, 1924), K.P. Jayaswal, (*Hindu Polity*, Calcutta, 1924), and J.P. Sharma (*Republics in Ancient India*, Leiden, 1968) emphasize the democratic character of the tribal states in the age of the Buddha. R.S. Sharma (*Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, 3rd edn, Delhi, 1991) provides a corrective to their nationalist and revivalist approach and throws light on the emergence of the taxation system which was a major prop of the early state in India. His *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India* (Delhi, 1983) is a seminal work devoted to,

among other things, the study of social change with special reference to the role of iron technology, dispersal of settled agriculture, growth of urban centres and trade, and their bearing on the rise and growth of Jainism and Buddhism. For the growth of urban centres also see: A. Ghosh, *The City in Early Historical India*, Simla, 1973; G. Erdody, *Urbanisation in Early Historic India*, Oxford, 1988; and F.R. Allchin, *The Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia: The Emergence of Cities and States*, Cambridge, 1995. Much has been written on punch-marked coinage. Michael Mitchiner (*The Origins of Indian Coinage*, London, 1973) has studied the evolution of punch-marked coinage whereas D.D. Kosambi's writings dealing with it (*Indian Numismatics*, Delhi, 1981) present the first scientific analysis of this subject, though its methodological importance has not yet been fully recognized. Data on society in the age of the Buddha are available in Richard Fick, *The Social Organisation of North-East India in Buddha's Time* (Calcutta, 1920); N.K. Wagle, *Society at the Time of the Buddha* (Bombay, 1966); and in the relevant sections of R.S. Sharma, *Shudras in Ancient India*, Delhi, 1980. V.S. Agrawala, *India as Known to Panini*, Lucknow, 1953, throws light on different aspects of social and material life. For information on the growth of mixed castes and the origins of untouchability see V. Jha, 'Varnasamkara in the Dharmasutras: Theory and Practice', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. XIII (1970); idem, 'Stages in the History of the Untouchables', *Indian Historical Review*, vol. II, no. 1 (1975). Devaraj Chanana (*Slavery in Ancient India*, Delhi, 1960), analyses the institution of slavery on the basis of the Buddhist and other sources and Uma Chakrabarti (*The Social Dimensions of Early Buddhism*, Delhi, 1987) elaborates on some of the points first made by D.D. Kosambi (*Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Bombay, 1956) and R.S. Sharma ('Material Background of the Origin of Buddhism', in Mohit Sen, ed., *Das Kapital Centenary Volume*, Delhi, 1967). Although there is a good amount of literature on heterodox religions, especially Buddhism and Jainism, the following works may be used with profit: Dharmanand Kosambi, *Bhagvan Buddha*, trans. from the Marathi to Hindi; Shripad Joshi, Delhi, 1956; W. Rahul, *What the Buddha Taught*, New York, 1962; Edward Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development*, Oxford, 1951; A.K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, Delhi, 1970; A.L. Basham, *History and Doctrine of the Ajivikas*, London, 1951; S. Stevenson, *The Heart of Jainism*, Oxford,

1945; and N.N. Bhattacharyya, *Jain Philosophy: Historical Outline*, Delhi, 1976. I.B. Horner (*Women under Primitive Buddhism*, London, 1930) gives an idea of the Buddhist attitude to women and P.S. Jaini (*Gender and Salvation*, Delhi, 1991) studies later Jaina sectarian debates centring around women's capacity to achieve spiritual liberation. For a different perception of the major developments, especially the emergence of states, see Kumkum Roy, *The Emergence of Monarchy in North India from the 8th to the 4th Centuries* BC, Delhi, 1994.

CHAPTER 6: THE FIRST EMPIRE

The relevant Puranic sources are found in F.E. Pargiter, *Dynasties of the Kali Age* (London, 1913). The *Arthashastra* of Kautilya has been translated by R. Shamasastri (Mysore, 1958), though a vastly improved study of the text is R.P. Kangle, *The Kautiliya Arthashastra*, 3 pts, Bombay, 1965. For a renewed scholarly interest in the dating of the work see: Thomas R. Trautmann, *Kautilya and the Arthashastra*, Leiden, 1971; S.C. Mishra, *Evolution of Kautilya's Arthashastra: An Inscriptional Approach*, Delhi, 1997. The *Mudrarakshasa* of Vishakhadatta, ed. K.H. Dhruva (Poona, 1923) is a later work but throws light on the history of the Mauryas. Buddhist evidence on the Maurya period comes from the *Dipavamsa*, ed. H. Oldenberg (London, 1879); *Mahavamsa*, ed. W. Geiger (London, 1908); and the *Divyavadana*, ed. E.B. Cowell and F.A. Neil (Cambridge, 1886). The translation of the *Indica* of Megasthenes is available in J.W. McCrindle, *Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian*, Calcutta, 1877. Also see K. Karttunen, *Indian in Early Greek Literature*, Helsinki, 1989. For the archaeological material found in the Maurya levels at various sites the excavation reports listed under Chapters 4 and 5, volumes of *Ancient India* and *Indian Archaeology—A Review* (both published by the Archaeological Survey of India), and the various learned journals may be consulted. Details on the archaeology of the Mauryan sites may be obtained from the relevant entries in A. Ghosh, ed., *An Encyclopaedia of Indian Archaeology*, Delhi, 1989. For Ashokan inscriptions Edward Hultzsch, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* vol. I (London, 1925) remains indispensable. For inscriptions discovered in recent years the following books, apart from the articles published in various journals, may be useful: D.C. Sircar, *Asokan Studies*, Calcutta, 1979; B.N. Mukherjee, *Studies in Aramaic Edicts of Ashoka*, Calcutta, 1984.

H.C. Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India*, discusses the basic points of the history of the Mauryas. But several monographs have been written on them, especially Ashoka. Mention may be made of: Vincent A. Smith, *Ashoka* (Oxford, 1903); D.R. Bhandarkar, *Ashoka* (Calcutta, 1925); B.M. Barua, *Ashoka and His Inscriptions* (Calcutta, 1948); and B.G. Gokhale, *Buddhism and Ashoka* (Bombay, 1949). Romila Thapar, *Ashoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (1st pub. Oxford, 1961) throws fresh light on the Maurya chronology and on the social and economic life of the period. Its revised edition (Delhi, 1997) has a useful bibliography on the Maurya period. For her recent views on the Maurya state see Romila Thapar, The *Mauryas Revisited* (Calcutta, 1988); idem, 'The State as Empire', in H. Claessen and P. Skalnik, eds, *The Study of the State*, The Hague, 1981. Cf. G. Fussman, 'Central and Provincial Administration in Ancient India: The Problem of the Mauryan Empire', *Indian Historical Review*, vol. XIV (1987-8). K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, ed., *The Age of the Nandas and Mauryas* (Varanasi, 1952), and idem, ed., *Comprehensive History of India*, vol. II (Bombay, 1957) are standard works on the Maurya period. G.M. Bongard-Levin, *Studies in Ancient India and Central Asia* (Calcutta, 1971) briefly discusses the *Indica* of Megasthenes and Ashokan epigraphs, but his *Mauryan India* (New Delhi, 1985) is a more comprehensive work. Relevant sections of the works of R.S. Sharma (*Shudras in Ancient India*, 2nd revd edn, Delhi, 1980; *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, 3rd edn, Delhi, 1991; *Perspectives in Social and Economic History of Early India*, 2nd revd edn, Delhi, 1995) furnish substantial information on society, economy and state in the Maurya period. For a treatment of evidence pertaining to the land and land revenue system see: U.N. Ghoshal, *Contributions to the History of Hindu Revenue System* (1st edn, Calcutta, 1929, 2nd edn with a Glossary of Fiscal terms and Technical Expressions compiled by S.K. Mitra, Calcutta, 1972; idem, *The Agrarian System in Ancient India*, Calcutta, 1930; N.N. Kher, *Agrarian and Fiscal Economy in the Mauryan and post-Mauryan Age*, Delhi, 1973. D.N. Jha, *Revenue system in post-Maurya and Gupta Times* (Calcutta, 1967), contains much relevant information on the taxation system, though it focuses on the subsequent period. On Maurya art, Niharranjan Ray, *Maurya and Post-Maurya Art* (Calcutta, 1976) remains the most lucid and authentic treatment of contemporary art; for a more recent analysis, however, see the relevant sections of Susan L. Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India*, New York, 1985.

CHAPTER 7: OF INVASIONS, TRADE AND CULTURE *c.* 200 BC–AD 300

The history of the period *c.* 200 BC–AD 300 covers a wide range of developments. Due to the constraints of space it is difficult to suggest a reading list which would take into account all of them. However, some of the important primary sources and modern works having good bibliographies may be mentioned.

The political history of the Shungas is largely based on the Puranic material collated by F.E. Pargiter in his *Dynasties of the Kali Age* (London, 1913), and on the *Malavikagnimitra* of Kalidasa translated into Hindi by S.R. Chaturvedi in *Kalidasa-Granthavali* (Bombay, 1950). Evidence relating to the Indo-Greeks is furnished by coins published in a number of catalogues such as A. Cunningham, *Coins of Alexander's Successors in the East* (London, 1873); R.B. Whitehead, *Catalogue of Coins in the Punjab Museum, Lahore*, vol. I (London, 1914); V. Smith, *Catalogue of Coins in the Indian Museum Calcutta* (Oxford, 1906); J. Allan, *Catalogue of Coins of Ancient India in the British Museum* (London, 1936); P. Gardner, *Catalogue of Coins in the British Museum, Greek and Scythic Kings* (London, 1886). Relevant epigraphic material is found in Sten Konow, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. II (Oxford, 1929). The *Milindapanho* (Sanaskrit, *Milindaprashna*) which is believed to be a record of dialogue between the Indo-Greek king Menander and the Buddhist Nagasena, is available in English as the *Questions of King Milinda* (Oxford, 1890-4). Other Buddhist sources for the early Christian centuries include the *Divyavadana* (ed. E.B. Cowell and F.A. Neil, Cambridge, 1886); *Lalitavistara* (ed. S. Lefmann, 2 vols, Halle, 1902-8) and *Mahavastu* (ed. E. Senart, 3 vols, Paris, 1882-97) and the *Jatakas*.

For important Satavahana inscriptions see *Epigraphia Indica*, VII and VIII; those of their successor dynasties may also be found in its relevant volumes. Numismatic evidence is available in E.J. Rapson, *Catalogue of Coins in the British Museum, Andhras and Western Ksatrapas* (London, 1913) and M. Rama Rao, *Satavahana Coins in the Andhra Pradesh Government Museum* (Hyderabad, 1961). Among the more recent works on Satavahana coins are: A.M. Shastri, ed., *Coinage of the Satavahanas and Coins from Excavations* (Nagpur, 1972) and I.K. Sarma, *Coinage of the Satavahana Empire* (Delhi, 1980). For an analysis of developments in the far south both epigraphic and literary evidence

is available. For the early Brahmi inscriptions found in Tamil Nadu see: I. Mahadevan, 'Corpus of Tamil Brahmi Inscriptions', in R. Nagaswamy, ed., *Seminar on Inscriptions* (Madras, 1966); idem, *Early Tamil Epigraphy: From the Earliest Times to the Sixth Century AD*, Harvard University, Cambridge, 2003. The English translation of some Shangam texts is available in J.V. Chelliah, *Ten Tamil Idylls* (Calcutta, 1947) and in *Puranaruru: Four hundred Songs of War and Wisdom: An Anthology*, trans. George L. Hart and Hank Heifetz, Columbia University Press, 1999. K. Kailasapathy (*Tamil Heroic Poetry*, London, 1968) has analysed the Shangam poetry and T. Takahashi (*Tamil Love Poetry and Poetics*, Leiden, 1995) discusses, among other things, its chronology. Also see Kamil V. Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1974; George L. Hart, *The Poems of Ancient Tamils: Their Milieu and their Sanskrit Counterparts*, Berkeley, 1975.

A number of excavation reports and related publications are available in addition to those mentioned in the previous chapter. A few of them may be listed here: John Marshall, *Taxila*, 3 vols, Cambridge, 1951, rpt, Varanasi, 1975; Herbert Hartel, 'Some Results of the Excavations at Sonkh', *German Scholars on India*, II, Delhi, 1976; B.N. Chapekar, *Report on the Excavations at Ter*, Poona, 1969; S.B. Deo, *Mahurjhari Excavation (1970-72)*, Nagpur, 1973; idem and M.K. Dhavilkar, *Paunar Excavation*, Nagpur, 1968; idem and R.S. Gupte, *Excavations at Bhokardan*, Nagpur, 1974; M.G. Diksit, *Excavation at Kaundinyapur*, Bombay, 1968; H.D. Sankalia and S.B. Deo, *Report on the Excavations at Nasik and Jorwe*, Poona, 1955; idem, *From History to Prehistory at Nevasa*, Poona, 1960; idem, *Excavations at Maheshwar and Navdatoli*, Poona-Baroda, 1958; H. Sarkar and S.P. Nainar, *Amaravati*, New Delhi, 1972; idem and B.N. Misra, *Nagarjunakonda*, New Delhi, 1972; H.D. Sankalia and M.G. Diksit, *Excavations at Brahmapuri (Kolhapur) 1945-46*, Poona, 1952; idem, *Excavations at Devnimori*, Baroda, 1966; T.V. Mahalingam, *Report on the Excavations in the Lower Kavery Valley*, Madras, 1970; S.H. Ritti, ed., *A Decade of Archaeological Studies in South India*, Dharwar, 1978; K.V. Raman, ed., *Excavations at Uraiyur (Tiruchirapalli) 1965-69*, Madras, 1988; R.E.M. Wheeler, 'Brahmagiri and Chandravalli 1947: Megalithic and Other Cultures in Mysore State', *Ancient India*, no. 4 (1947-8); idem, 'Arikamedu: An Indo-Roman Trading Station on the East Coast of India', *Ancient India*, no. 2 (1946); G. Yazdani, 'The Megaliths: Their Culture, Ecology,

Economy and Technology', in S.B. Deo and K. Paddayya, eds, *Recent Advances in Indian Archaeology*, Poona, 1988. Several monographs based largely on archaeological reports are important. For example, R. Subrahmaniam, *Salihundam*, Hyderabad, 1964; M.K. Dhavalikar, *Sanchi: A Cultural Study*, Poona, 1965; K. Krishnamurthy, *Nagarjunakonda: A Cultural Study*, Delhi, 1977; A.H. Dani, *The Historic City of Taxila*, UNESCO, 1986; D.M. Srinivasan, ed., *Mathura: The Cultural Heritage*, Delhi, 1989; C. Margabandhu, *Archaeology of the Satavahana-Kshatrapa Times*, New Delhi, 1985.

For authentic reconstruction of the political history of the period see: H.C. Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India*; K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, ed., *Comprehensive History of India*, II, Bombay, 1957, rpt, Delhi, 1987. For the history of Indo-Greeks see A.K. Narain, *The Indo-Greeks*, London, 1957. Besides, J.E. Van Lohuizen de Leeuw, *The Scythian Period* (Leiden, 1949) discusses the sources relating to the Scythian period. Several works of uneven merit deal specifically with the Kushanas: B.N. Puri, *India under the Kushanas*, Bombay, 1965; Rosenfield, *Dynastic Arts of the Kushanas*, Berkeley, 1967, B. Chattopadhyay, *The Age of the Kushanas*, Calcutta, 1967; idem, *Kushana State and Indian Society*, Calcutta, 1975; B.N. Mukerjee, *The Kushanas and the Deccan*, Calcutta, 1968; idem, *The Economic Factors in Kushana History*, Calcutta, 1970; idem, *The Disintegration of the Kushana Empire*, Varanasi, 1976. Discussion of the sources relating to the Scythians is found in R. Ghirshman, *Begram* (Cairo, 1946) and are relevant to the study of Kushanas. P.T.S. Aiyangar, *History of the Tamils to 600 AD*, Madras, 1929; K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India*, Oxford, 1958; and G. Yazdani, ed., *The Early History of the Deccan*, Oxford, 1960, are relevant for the study of the process of state formation in south India. Also see: Clerence Maloney, 'Archaeology in South India: Accomplishments and Prospects', in Burton Stein, ed., *Essays on South India*, New Delhi, 1976; Rajan Gurukkal, 'Forms of Production and Forces of Change in Ancient Tamil Country', *Studies in History* (New Series), v, no. 2 (1989). For an itemization of varied pieces of information culled from the Shangam literature see: N. Subramanian, *Sangam Polity*, Madras, 1966. Information on poltical ideas and institutions is available in a number of works of which T.V. Mahalingam's *South Indian Polity* (Madras, 1955) may be useful, though it lacks critical analysis of the source material. R.S. Sharma

deals with some of the features of the Satavahana polity (*Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*) but does not throw light on the problem of state formation in the far south.

Material on trade and trade-routes can be gathered from such primary sources as the Jatakas, Pliny's *Natural History* and Ptolemy's *Geography*. But the *Periplus of the Erythaean Sea*, trans. W.H. Schoff (London, 1912) is an indispensable original text for the study of India's trade contacts with the Western world during the early centuries of the Christian era. The work has also been edited by L. Casson under the title *Periplus Maris Erythaei: Text with Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Princeton, 1989). Equally important source for reconstructing the history of trade consists of the Roman coins found in the Indian subcontinent which have been discussed in a large number of articles. But the following are the standard works on the subject: P.L. Gupta, *Punch-marked Coins in the Andhra Pradesh Government Museum*, Hyderabad, 1960; P.J. Turner, *Roman Coins from India*, London, 1989. The significance of these coins have been discussed by several scholars including B.D. Chattopadhyaya (*Coins and Currency System in South India*, Delhi, 1977). H.G. Rawlinson, *Intercourse between India and the Western World* (Cambridge, 1916), E.H. Warmington, *Commerce between the Roman Empire and India* (Cambridge, 1928) and R.E.M. Wheeler, *Rome Beyond Imperial Frontiers* (Pelican, 1951) are the pioneer works on the subject. All these scholarly studies have sought to provide historical justification for the British exploitation of Indian resources in modern times. In recent years a renewed interest in the Indian Ocean trade, especially India's commercial and cultural contact with the West in ancient times, has been in evidence and now several publications are available, some of which are: G. Pollet, ed., *India and the Ancient World: History, Trade and Culture before AD 650* (Prof. P.H.L. Eggermont Volume), Leuven, 1987; Vimala Begley and Richard Daniel De Puma, eds, *Rome and India: The Ancient Sea Trade*, Delhi, 1992; Marie-Françoise Boussac and Jean-François Salles, eds, *Athens, Aden, Arikamedu*, Delhi, 1995; Himanshu Prabha Ray and Jean-François Salles, eds, *Tradition and Archaeology: Early Maritime Contacts in the Indian Ocean*, Delhi, 1996; F.D. Romanis and A. Tchernia, eds, *Crossings: Early Mediterranean Contacts with India*, Delhi, 1997. Himanshu Prabha Ray focuses on the Satavahana trade in *Monastery and Guild* (Delhi, 1986) and devotes attention to India's trade relations with the Western

world as well as with South-East Asia in *The Winds of Change* (Delhi, 1994), though she lays undue emphasis on the role of Buddhism. L. Boulnois, *The Silk Road*, London, 1966, gives an interesting account of China's silk trade in which Indians participated. Kameshwar Prasad (*Cities, Crafts and Commerce under the Kushanas*, Delhi, 1984); Xinru Liu (*Ancient India and Ancient China*, Delhi, 1988) study trade between India on the one hand and China and Central Asia on the other. For a treatment of India's contact with Central Asia and China also see: P.C. Bagchi, *India and China* (Calcutta, 1944) and N.P. Chakravarti, *India and Central Asia* (Calcutta, 1927). Moti Chandra, *Sarthavaha* (Hindi), Patna, 1953 (English trans. *Trade and Trade Routes in Ancient India*, New Delhi, 1977) and relevant portions of G.L. Adhya, *Early Indian Economics*, Bombay, 1966 continue to provide a corrective to the Western imperialist perception of India's trade with the outside world. Information on guilds has been systemized by R.C. Majumdar (*Corporate Life in Ancient India*, Calcutta, 1918), though his work is now out of date. Primary data on arts, crafts and urbanization in the early centuries before and after Christ can be obtained from the excavation reports and writings on trade, though mention of some urban studies may be made here: H. Sarkar, 'Emergence of Urban Centres in Early Historical Andhradesa', in B.M. Pande and B.D. Chattopadhyaya, eds, *Archaeology and History: Essays in Memory of A. Ghosh*, II, Delhi, 1987; R. Champakalakshmi, *Trade, Ideology and Urbanisation*, Delhi, 1996; V. Thakur, *Urbanisation in Ancient India*, Delhi, 1981. R.S. Sharma's seminal work *Urban Decay in India c. 300-c. 1000* (Delhi, 1987) has, however, argued convincingly on the basis of archaeological material that urban centres in most parts of the country began to decline from the third/fourth century AD which has generated a fierce debate among scholars.

Studies of social structure and political ideas have largely been based on literary texts some of which have already been mentioned. Important Brahmanical sources include the Dharmashastra texts like *Manusmriti* (trans. G. Buhler, *Sacred Books of the East*, Oxford, 1886) and the *Vishnusmriti* (trans. J. Jolly, *Sacred Books of the East*, VII, Oxford, 1880), descriptions of the *Yugadharma* in the early Puranas (especially the *Vayu Purana*, ed. Mansukhram Mor, Calcutta, 1959; *Vishnu Purana*, Gita Press edn, vs 2009; *Brahmanda Purana*, ed. Sriram Sharma Acharya, Mathura, 1967), the *Shantiparva* of the *Mahabharata* (Gita Press edn,

1970-3) and the *Mahabhashya* of Patanjali (ed. F. Kielhorn, 3 vols, 1892-1909). For social history of the post-Maurya centuries see: Sibesh Chandra Bhattacharya, *Some Aspects of Indian Society from c. 2nd Century BC to c. 4th Century AD*, Calcutta, 1978; R.S. Sharma in his *Shudras in Ancient India* discusses the position of shudras during the period; idem, 'The Kali Age: A Period of Social Crisis', in D.N. Jha, ed., *The Feudal Order: State, Society and Ideology in early Medieval India*, New Delhi, 2002. Several source-wise studies of social life and other aspects of history are available. For example, see, B.N. Puri, *India as Known to Patanjali*, Bombay, 1957; M.M. Dass, *Women in Manu and His Seven Commentators*, Varanasi, 1963. R.N. Sharma in his *Brahmins Through the Ages* (Delhi, 1977) has devoted a section to the post-Maurya period and has culled references to different aspects of social and political life from the lawbook of Manu in *Ancient India as Known to Manu*, Delhi, 1980. These works lack historical perspective but are useful compendiums of information on society and polity. For the history of political ideas and institutions see: N.C. Bandyopadhyaya, *Development of Hindu Polity and Political Theories*, Calcutta, 1927; U.N. Ghoshal, *A History of Indian Political Ideas*, Bombay, 1959; D.N. Jha, *Revenue system of Post-Maurya and Gupta Times*, Calcutta, 1967; B.P. Roy, *Political Ideas and Institutions in the Mahabharata*, Calcutta, 1975; A.K. Narain, 'The Kushan State: A Preliminary Study', in Henri J.M. Classen and Peter Skalnik, eds, *The Study of the State*, Mouton, 1981; Sudarshan Senviratne, 'Kalinga and Andhra: The Process of Secondary State Formation in Early India', *Indian Historical Review*, VII, nos 1-2. For a critical analysis of the post-Maurya polity R.S. Sharma's *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions* is indispensable. Also see: J.W. Spellman, *Political Theory of Ancient India: A study of Kingship from the Earliest Times to Circa AD 300*, London, 1964.

There is a vast bulk of literature on religious developments and the following works may be consulted: A.K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism* (New Delhi, 1970); T.W. Rhys Davids, *Buddhism, Its History and Literature* (London, 1923); Edward Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development* (Oxford, 1951, rpt, New York, 1959); Jagnanderlal Jaini, *Outlines of Jainism* (Cambridge, 1940); N.R. Guseva, *Jainism* (Bombay, 1971); N.N. Bhattacharyya, *Jain Philosophy: Historical Outline* (New Delhi, 1976); Jan Gonda, *Aspects of Early Vishnuism* (2nd edn, Delhi, 1969); idem, *Vishnuism and Shaivism: A Comparison* (London, 1970).

Unlike most scholars D.D. Kosambi ('The Historical Krishna', *The Times of India*, Annual Number, 1965) and S. Jaiswal, *Origin and Development of Vaishnavism* (2nd revd edn, Delhi, 1981) have analysed the material basis of Vaishnavism. Of interest may also be D.D. Kosambi, 'Social and Economic Aspects of the *Bhagvad-Gita*', in *Myth and Reality*, Bombay, 1962. For the history of contemporary art and architecture see relevant portions of: Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture*, Bombay, 1959; Benjamin Rowland, *The Art and Architecture of India*, Harmondsworth, 3rd revd edn, 1967; J.N. Banerjea, *Religion in Art and Archaeology*, Lucknow, 1968; Vidya Dahejia, *Early Buddhist Rock Temples*, London, 1972; Susan L. Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India*, New York, 1985. Niharranjan Ray's *Maurya and Post-Maurya Art* (Calcutta, 1976), however, remains indispensable. Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, *Science and Society in Ancient India*, Calcutta, 1977 and Francis Zimmermann, *The Jungle and the Aroma of Meats*, Berkeley, 1987 are useful for a study of the development of ancient Indian medicine during the post-Maurya period.

CHAPTER 8: FEUDAL BEGINNINGS IN THE 'GOLDEN AGE'

The inscriptional material of the Gupta period is found in J.F. Fleet, ed., *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, III (Calcutta, 1888), revd version by D.R. Bhandarkar, ed. B. Chhabra and G.S. Gai, New Delhi, 1981; V.V. Mirashi, ed., *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, V, *Inscriptions of the Vakatakas*, Ootacamund, 1963; K.V. Ramesh and S.P. Tewari, eds, *A Copper-plate Hoard of the Gupta Period from Bagh, Madhya Pradesh*, 1990; G.S. Gai, ed., *The Inscriptions of the Kadambas*, Delhi, 1996. For numismatic evidence see: John Allan, *Catalogue of the Coins of the Gupta Dynasty in the British Museum* (London, 1914) and A.S. Altekar, *Catalogue of the Gupta Gold Coins in the Bayana Hoard* (Bombay, 1954); idem, *Corpus of Indian Coins*, IV, *The Coinage of the Gupta Empire* (Varanasi, 1957). The travel account of the Chinese pilgrim Fa-hsien is available in English trans. by H.A. Giles, *The Travels of Fa-hsien* (Cambridge, 1923). Literary sources include Vishakhadatta's *Devichandraguptam*, the works of Kalidasa (translated as *Shakuntala and Other Writings of Kalidasa* by A. Ryder, London, 1912), *Mrichchhakatika* of Shudraka (trans. A. Ryder, *The Little Clay Cart*, Cambridge, Mass, 1906), *Kamasutra* of Vatsyayana (trans. Wendy Doniger and Sudhir

Kakar, Oxford, USA, 2002), and the *Vishnu Purana* (trans. H.H. Wilson, London, 1864-70). The English translation of the contemporary legal texts are available in G. Bühler, *Sacred Laws of the Aryas* (Oxford, 1879-82) and J. Jolly, *The Minor Law Books* (Oxford, 1869). The first Sanskrit lexicon, *Namalinganushasana* (*Amarakosha*), attributed to Amarasimha, was edited by H.D. Sharma and N.G. Sardesai with the commentary of Kshirasvami and was published from Poona in 1941. The *Aryabhatiyam* of Aryabhata, the first Indian mathematician, was trans. by W.E. Clark (Chicago, 1930). The *Brihajjataka* (trans. V. Subramanya Sastri, Mysore, 1929) and *Brihatsamhita* (trans. V. Subramanya Sastri and M. Ramakrishna Bhat, 2 vols, Bangalore, 1947) of Varahamihira contain references to social and economic life. For information about archaeological material found in the Gupta levels at various sites see the excavation reports mentioned in the bibliographies of Chapters 4-7 as well as *Ancient India*; and *Indian Archaeology—A Review* and A. Ghosh, ed., *An Encyclopaedia of Indian Archaeology*, Delhi, 1989.

Of the many works on the Gupta period S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar, *Studies in Gupta History*, Madras, 1928 and R.D. Banerji, *The Age of the Imperial Guptas*, Varanasi, 1933 are the earlier ones. R.C. Majumdar and A.S. Altekar, eds, *The Vakataka-Gupta Age* (Lahore, 1946, rpt, Delhi, 1960) and R.C. Majumdar, ed., *The Classical Age*, vol. III of the *History and Culture of the Indian People* (Bombay, 1954) are quite popular, despite their revivalist overtone. Among the more recent studies mention may be made of B.G. Gokhale, *Samudra Gupta: Life and Times*, Bombay, 1962; S.K. Maity, *Gupta Civilisation*, Calcutta, 1974; idem, *The Imperial Guptas and their Times*, Delhi, 1975. But by far the most comprehensive work on the Guptas is P.L. Gupta, *The Imperial Guptas*, 2 vols, Varanasi, 1974-9.

S.K. Maity, *Economic Life in Northern India in the Gupta Period*, 2nd edn, Calcutta, 1970, is the first serious attempt to organize the economic data relating to the Gupta period. Before Independence a number of scholars wrote on agrarian system, especially the question of land-ownership, but their writings are inhibited by their nationalist zeal. U.N. Ghosal's works (*Contribution to the History of Hindu Revenue System*, Calcutta, 1929, revd edn, Calcutta, 1972; *Agrarian System in Ancient India*, Calcutta, 1930, rpt, Calcutta, 1973) are comparatively balanced, though not completely free from the nationalist bias. For a

different treatment of the history of land system and taxation during the Gupta period see: D.N. Jha, *Revenue System in Post-Maurya and Gupta Times*, Calcutta, 1977. For the first most critical analysis of sources bearing on the agrarian life and the evolution of feudal land tenure from the Gupta period onwards see: R.S. Sharma, 'The Origins of Feudalism in India', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, I, pt 3 (1958); *Indian Feudalism c. AD 300-1200*, Calcutta, 1965, 2nd edn, Delhi, 1980. Unlike Sharma, D.D. Kosambi has visualized two stages in the development of Indian feudalism (*Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Bombay, 1956), though both agree that from the Gupta period onwards urban centres began to decline. The process of decay of towns forms the subject matter of Sharma's *Urban Decay c. 300-1000* (Delhi, 1987). The feudalism thesis has generated much heated debate which has been summed up by D.N. Jha in his introduction to *The Feudal Order: State, Society and Ideology in early Medieval Period*, New Delhi, 2002. K.M. Shrimali's *Agrarian Structure in Central India and the Northern Deccan*, Delhi, 1987, a study based on Vakataka inscriptions, supports the feudalism theory. Sudhakar Chattopadhyaya (*Social Life in Ancient India in the Background of the Yajanavalkyasmriti*, Calcutta, 1965) has compiled information on caste, education, marriage, occupations, women, untouchability, etc. A similar exercise was undertaken much earlier by H.C. Chakladar (*Social Life in Ancient India: Studies in Vatsyayana's Kamasutra*, Calcutta, 1929) and B.S. Upadhyaya (*India in Kalidasa*, Delhi, 1968). The last two chapters of R.S. Sharma's *Shudras in Ancient India* are devoted to the position of lower orders during Gupta times. R.N. Sharma's treatment of the position of brahmanas in his *Brahmins Through the Ages* (Delhi, 1977) is inadequate. G.P. Upadhyay's *Brahmanas in Ancient India* (Delhi, 1979) is a competent study of the role of brahmanas though it does not deal with them specifically in the Gupta context. Chitralekha Gupta, *The Kayasthas: A Study in the Formation and Early History of a Caste* (Calcutta, 1996) contains a brief discussion of the relevant Gupta evidence and provides a useful bibliography on the history of kayasthas. Writings on the history of women do not deal separately with the Gupta period and A.S. Altekar's *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilisation* (Varanasi, 1956) still remains influential despite various articles written from a feminist point of view. Shalini Shah, *The Making of Womanhood: Gender Relations in the Mahabharata* (Delhi,

1995) may be consulted for an interdisciplinary approach as well as for a bibliography on women's history in ancient India. Education during the Gupta period receives attention in A.S. Altekar, *Education in Ancient India* (Varanasi, 1965) and Radha Kumud Mookerji, *Ancient Indian Education: Brahmanical and Buddhist* (3rd edn, Delhi, 1969), though these works are useful for earlier periods as well. H.D. Sankalia's *The University of Nalanda* (Delhi, 1972) is a good study of a specific Buddhist centre of education. For various aspects of economic and social history see R.S. Sharma, *Perspectives in Social and Economic History of Early India* (2nd revd edn, Delhi, 1995). D.N. Jha (*Revenue System in Post-Maurya and Gupta Times*, Calcutta, 1967) deals with agrarian system and taxation. For issues of polity, kingship and law see: V.R. Ramachandra Diksitar, *The Gupta Polity*, Madras, 1952; U.N. Ghoshal, *A History of Indian Political Ideas*, Bombay, 1959; R.S. Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India;* J.D.M. Derret, *Religion, Law and the State in Ancient India* (New York, 1968); Robert Lingat, *The Classical Law of India*, Berkeley, 1973. Unlike the above-mentioned works which deal with early India as a whole, Madhukar M. Patkar's *Narada, Brihaspati and Katyayana: A Comparative Study in Judicial Procedure* (Delhi, 1978) seeks to analyse the legal texts of the Gupta period. There are quite a few works dealing with the evolution of early Indian mythology and religious sects, though none of them is devoted exclusively to the Gupta period. The following works, however, may be of much value: R.G. Bhandarkar, *Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Minor Religious Systems* (Strassburg, 1913); Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths: A Sourcebook Translated from the Sanskrit,* Baltimore, 1975; idem, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Shiva*; J. Gonda, *Aspects of Early Vishnuism*, 2nd edn, Delhi, 1969; idem, *Vishnuism and Shaivism: A Comparison*, Delhi, 1976; Sukumar Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India*, London, 1962; A.K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism*, Delhi, 1970; R.S. Sharma, 'Material Milieu of Tantricism', in R.S. Sharma, ed., *Indian Society: Historical Probings*, Delhi, 1974; S. Jaiswal, *The Origin and Development of Vaishnavism*, 2nd edn, Delhi, 1981. D.P. Chattopadhyaya, *Indian Philosophy: A Popular Introduction* (Delhi, 1964) and A.K. Warder, *Outline of Indian Philosophy* (Delhi, 1971) are good introductory readings on the development of philosophical ideas. For works devoted exclusively to the art and architecture of the Gupta period see: Prithvi Kumar Agrawala, *Gupta Temple Architecture*, Varanasi,

1968; V.S. Agrawala, *Gupta Art: A History of Indian Art in the Gupta Period* (1st pub. in 1948, rpt, Calcutta, 1977; Pratapaditya Pal, *The Ideal Image: The Gupta Sculptural Tradition and Its Influence*, New York, 1978; J.C. Harle, *Gupta Sculpture: Indian Sculpture of the Fourth to the Sixth Centuries AD*, Oxford, 1974. Frederick M. Asher, *The Art of Eastern India, 300-800*, Minneapolis, 1980 is a study of Gupta and post-Gupta sculptures from Bihar, West Bengal and Bangladesh. A detailed study of Ajanta is by Sheila L. Weiner (*Ajanta: Its Place in Buddhist Art*, Berkeley, 1977) and G. Yazdani, *Ajanta*, 4 vols, London, 1930-55, is a profusely illustrated study of Ajanta murals. For a comprehensive treatment of the different facets of the Gupta art Joanna G. Williams, *The Art of Gupta India*, Princeton, 1982 is recommended. Several works deal with literary history of ancient India and devote adequate space to the developments in the Gupta period. For example, see: A.B. Keith, *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, Oxford, 1920; Sushilkumar De, *History of Sanskrit Literature*, Calcutta, 1947; S.N. Dasgupta, *A History of Sanskrit Literature* (Classical Period), Calcutta, 1962; Walter Ruben, *Kalidasa*, Academie Verlag, Berlin, 1957 [rpt. People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1984] R.C. Hazra, *Studies in the Puranic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs*, Dacca University [rept. Delhi, 1975], 1940 and Ludo Rocher, The *Puranas*, Wiesbaden, 1986 deal with the Puranic literature. D.M. Bose et al., eds, *A Concise History of Science in India*, New Delhi, 1971, contains substantial material on scientific developments during the Gupta period.

CHAPTER 9: EMERGENCE OF FEUDAL INDIA

Inscriptions, especially the land charters, form the main source for the history of India during the early medieval period. Although not all of them are published, a large number of them have appeared in various periodicals and such serial publications as the *Epigraphia Indica*, *Epigraphia Carnatica*, *South Indian Inscriptions*, *Indian Antiquary*, *Annual Report of the Mysore Archaeological Department*, *Annual Report of Epigraphy*, *Annual Report of South Indian Epigraphy*, *Travancore Archaeological Series*, *Hyderabad Archaeological Series*, The volumes of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* bring together inscriptions belonging to the dynasties of the Vakatakas, Guptas, Kalachuris, Shilaharas and Paramaras. Besides, several region-wise compilations of inscriptions are also available, e.g.

N.G. Majumdar, *Inscriptions of Bengal*, Rajashahi, 1929; G.V. Acharya, ed., *Historical Inscriptions of Gujarat,* Bombay, 1942; M.G. Diksit, ed., *Select Inscriptions from Maharashtra*, Poona, 1947; A.S. Gadre, ed., *Important Inscriptions from the Baroda State*, Poona, 1943; M.M. Sharma, *Inscriptions of Ancient Assam,* Gauhati, 1978 *Inscriptions of Orissa*, II-VI, Bhubaneswar, 1960-74 (?) . . . , *Karnataka Inscriptions*, I-V, Dharwar, 1941-69; *Inscriptionum Andhrica*, I-IV, Hyderabad, 1971-5; Michael D. Willis, ed., *Inscriptions of Gopaksetra*, London, 1996.

No corpus of early medieval coins is available, though Lallanji Gopal, *Early Medieval Coin-Types of Northern India*, Numismatic Society of India, Varanasi, 1966, A.K. Shrivastava, *Coin Hoards of Uttar Pradesh (1882-1979),* The State Museum, Lucknow, 1980 and W. Elliot, *Coins of Southern India*, Strassbourg, 1897 give an idea of the types of coins from north and south India. Listing of coins and coin hoards can also be found in B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *Coins and Currency System in South India,* New Delhi, 1977, and J.S. Deyell, *Living Without Silver: The Monetary History of Early Medieval North India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1990, though neither can claim to be exhaustive. For a more recent study of early medieval coins the most useful is R.S. Sharma, 'Paucity of Metallic Coinage', in his *Early Medieval Indian Society: A Study in Feudalisation*, Orient Longman, Kolkata, 2001. Numerous articles on ealy medieval currency situation have been published. Although it is not possible to mention all of them, P.L. Gupta and A.K. Jha, ed, *Numismatics and Archaeology*, 2nd International Colloquium, Indian Institute of Numismatics, Anjaneri (Nashik), 1987 and A.K. Jha, ed., *Coinage, Trade and Economy*, Indian Institute of Numismatics, Anjaneri, 1991 may be consulted for useful writings relating to specific coin series as well as to the general issues of numismatic history.

Several foreign travellers visited India during the early medieval period. The accounts of the Chinese pilgrims are available in the following books: *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malay Archipelagi by I-tsing*, trans. T. Takakusu, Oxford, 1886; *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India*, T. Watters, ed. T. Rhys Davids and S.W. Bushell, London, 1884; *Si-Yu-Ki, Buddhist Records of the Western World*, trans. from the Chinese of Hiuen/Tsang (AD 629) by Samuel Beal, London, 1884; *Travels of Fa-hian and Sung-Yun*, trans. Samuel Beal, London, 1869. During this period India came in contact with

the Islamic world, which is why several Arabic and Persian works, throwing light on various aspects of Indian life are available. The most important of these is Alberuni's *Tahqiq-i-Hind* translated into English by E.C. Sachau as *Alberuni's India*, 2 vols (London, 1910), its shorter version being Qeyamuddin Ahmad, ed., *India by Al-Biruni*, 2nd edn, New Delhi, 1988. References to India found in a variety of Arabic and Persian sources are available in H.M. Elliot and J. Dowson, ed., *The History of India as Told by its Own Historians: The Muhammadan Period*, I-II, London, 1867. Among the monographs dealing with the advent of Arabs mention may be made of Muhammad Habib, *Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni*, Bombay, 1927; M. Nazim, *Life and Times of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna*, Cambridge, 1931; C.E. Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids*, Edinburgh, 1963; idem, *The Later Ghaznavids*, Edinburgh, 1977. Derryl N. Maclean (*Religion and Society in Arab Sind*, Leiden, 1989) throws light on the social and religious condition in north-western India on the eve of the Arab invasion as well as on the issues relating to religious conversions in the early phase of the spread of Islam in India. Maqbul Ahmad (*Indo-Arab Relations*, Indian Council of Cultural Relations, Delhi, 1969) and Tara Chand (*Influence of Islam on Indian Culture*, 2nd edn, Allahabad, 1976) discuss the Islamic impact on different aspects of Indian society and culture. B.D. *Chattopadhyaya, Representing the Other?: Sanskrit Sources and the Muslims*, Delhi,1998 examines epigraphic and literary texts to show how differently Muslims are viewed in different contexts.

Many literary works of various genre were written during the early medieval period. Some of the important ones are *Harshacharita* of Bana (trans. E.B. Cowell and F. W. Thomas, London, 1897), *Kadambari* of Bana (trans. C.M. Ridding, London, 1896), *Chaurapanchasika* of Bilhana (trans. B.S. Miller, Penguin, 1990), *Gitagovinda* of Jayadeva (trans. B.S. Miller, OUP, Delhi, 1977), and *Shatakatrayam* of Bhartrihari (trans. B.S. Miller, Columbia University Press, 1967). The *Subhashitarat-nakosha* of Vidyakara (trans. D. Ingalls, Harvard, 1965), an anthology of stanzas drawn from various sources, is fairly representative of the classical Sanskrit poetical literature. Among the various regional histories, the *Rajatarangini* of Kalhana (trans. M. Stein, London, 1900) is the most important source for the history of Kashmir. Other literary works of the period include *Kathasaritsagara* of Somadeva (trans. C.H. Tawney, Calcutta, 1880-7, rept. Motilal

Banarsidass, Delhi, 1968), *Malatimadhava* (trans. M.R. Kale, Bombay, 1928), *Uttararamacharita* (ed. & trans. P.V. Kane, Delhi, 1962), and *Mahaviracharita* of Bhavabhuti, *Naishadacharita* of Shri Harsha (trans. K.K. Handiqui, Poona, 1965). Numerous works dealing with secular and religious works are available, the more authoritative ones being: M. Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, 2 vols, 2nd edn, Delhi, 1977; A.B. Keith, *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, London, 1920; S.N. Dasgupta & S.K. De, *A History of Sanskrit Literature, Classical Period*, 2nd edn, Calcutta, 1962; Sukumari Bhattacharji, *History of Sanskrit Literature: Classical Age*, Calcutta, 1993; N.N. Bhattacharyya, *History of Indian Erotic Literature*, Delhi, 1975; Teun Goudriaan & Sanjukta Gupta, *Hindu Tantric and Sakta Literature*, Wiesbaden, 1981; Ludo Rocher, *The Puranas*, Wiesbaden, 1986. Several scholars have written on the history of poetics but P.V. Kane's *History of Sanskrit Poetics* (3rd edn, Delhi, 1961) remains the most authoritative just as his *History of Dharmashastra* (vol. 1, 2 parts, Poona, 1968-75) provides a comprehensive idea of the normative and commentarial texts of the period. Jan E.M. Houben, ed., *Ideology and Status of the Sanskrit Language,* E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1996 is a collection of interesting and insightful articles on the changing status and social role of Sanskrit. Sheldo Pollock ('The Death of Sanskrit', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 43, no. 2, April 2001) presents a stimulating survey of the Sanskrit literature during the medieval period and the British rule.

Of the many works on the history of the early medieval period, H.C. Ray, *Dynastic History of Northern India (Early Medieval Period),* 2 vols, Calcutta, 1931-6; K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India* (4th edn, London, 1975) and G. Yazdani, ed., *The Early History of the Deccan* (London, 1960) are extremely useful. Detailed studies of specific ruling dynasties or regions of north India include R.S. Tripathi, *History of Kanauj* (Banaras, 1937); R.C. Majumdar, *History of Bengal* (Dacca, 1943); Niharranjan Ray, *A History of the Bengali People (Ancient Period),* trans. from Bengali, John H. Wood, Calcutta, 1994; R.D. Banerji, *History of Orissa* (Calcutta, 1931); D. C. Ganguli, *History of the Paramara Dynasty* (Dacca, 1943); D. Sharma, *Early Chauhan Dynasties* (Delhi, 1959); A.K. Majumdar, *The Chalukyas of Gujarat* (Bombay, 1956). Several scholars have also made similar studies in relation to the southern India. They are: A.S. Altekar (*The Rashtrakutas and their Times*, Poona, 1934), R. Gopalan (*History of the Pallavas of Kanchi,*

Madras, 1928), C. Minaksi (*Adminstration and Social Life under the Pallavas,* Madras, 1938), J.D.M. Derett (*The Hoysalas,* London, 1957), K.A. Nilakanta Sastri (*The Pandyan Kingdom,* London, 1928, and *The Cholas*, Madras, 1955). Although most of these works are focused on the political-dynastic changes, they also provide enough material on socio-cultural aspects of history.

A comprehensive and trend-setting study of the early medieval feudal social polity is available in R.S. Sharma's *Indian Feudalism* (Calcutta, 1965), *Social Changes in Early Medieval India* (Delhi, 1969), *Urban Decay in India c. 300-1000* (Delhi, 1987) and *Early Medieval Indian Society: A Study in Feudalisation*, Calcutta, 2001 and his numerous articles. The Marxist perception of the early medieval social dynamics presented by Sharma has inspired a great deal of research on different aspects of social polity. For example, see B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture in North India in the Twelfth Century*, Allahabad, 1972; R.N. Nandi, *Religiuos Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*, Delhi, 1973; idem, *Social Roots of Religion in Ancient India*, Calcutta, 1986; idem, *State Formation, Agrarian Growth and Social Change in Feudal South India c.* AD *600-1200*, Delhi, 2000; N. Karashima, *South Indian History and Society: Studies from Inscriptions,* AD *850-1800*, Delhi, 1984.; idem, 'The Untouchables in Tamil Inscriptions and other Historical Sources in Tamilnadu', in H. Kotani, ed., *Caste System, Untouchability and the Depressed*, Delhi, 1997; O.P. Prasad, *Decay and Revival of Urban Centres in Medieval South India,* New Delhi, 1986; R. Tirumalai, *Land Grants and Agrarian Reactions in Cola and Pandya Times*, Madras, 1987; V.K. Jain, *Trade and Traders in Western India* (AD *1000-1300*), Delhi, 1990; Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahmana Settlements in Kerala: Historical Studies*, Calicut, 1978; idem, *The Political Structure of Early Medieval South India,* New Delhi, 1993; Rajan Gurukkal, *The Kerala Temples and Early Medieval Agrarian System*, Sukapuram, 1992; Anjali Malik, *Merchants and Merchandise in Northern India* AD *600-1000*, Delhi, 1994; V. Nath, *Puranas and Acculturation: A Historico-Anthropological Perspective*, Delhi, 2001; Several scholars have opposed the Marxist perception of social dynamics presented by these writings. For example, see: Burton Stein's, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*, Delhi, 1980 and some of his articles especially, 'The State and the Agrarian Order in Medieval South India: A Historiographical Critique', in Burton Stein, ed, *Essays on South India*, Honolulu, 1975 and 'The Segmentary State: Interim

Reflections', in Hermann Kulke, ed., *The State in India 1000-1700*, Delhi, 1995; Hermann Kulke, 'Fragmentation and Segmentation versus Integration? Reflections on the Concepts of Feudalism and the Segmentary State in Indian History', *Studies in History*, IV, no. 2 (1982); Kenneth Hall, *Trade and Statecraft in the Age of the Cholas*, Delhi, 1980; G.W. Spencer, *The Politics of Expansion—The Chola Conquests of Sri Lanka and Srivijaya*, Madras, 1983; Andre Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, I, Delhi, 1990; James Heitzman, 'State Formation in South India 850-1280', in H. Kulke, ed., *The State in India 1000-1700*, Delhi, 1995; idem, *Gifts of Power: Lordhsip in an Early Indian State*, Delhi, 1997; B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India*, Delhi, 1994; Ranabir Chakravarti, ed., *Trade in Early India*, New Delhi, 2001, Introduction; R. Champakalaksmi, 'State and Economy in South India AD 400-1300', in Romila Thapar, ed., *Recent Perspectives of Early Indian History*, Bombay, 1995; idem, 'The Medieval South Indian Guilds: Their Role in Trade and Urbanisation', in D.N. Jha, ed., *Society and Ideology in India: Essays in Honour of Professor R.S. Sharma*, Delhi, 1996; idem, *Trade, Ideology and Urbanisation: South India 300 BC to AD 1300*, Delhi, 1996; idem, 'From Devotion and Dissent to Dominance: The Bhakti of the Tamil Alvars and Nayanars', in R. Champakalaksmi and S. Gopal, eds, *Tradition, Dissent and Ideology: Essays in Honour of Romila Thapar*, Delhi, 1996. For a critique of some of these works see D.N. Jha, ed., *The Feudal Order: State, Society and Ideology in Ealy Medieval India*, Delhi, 2000. A. Appadorai, *Economic Conditions in Southern India (1000-1500)*, Madras, 1936 presents a considerable amount of material on economic history in a traditional framework.

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